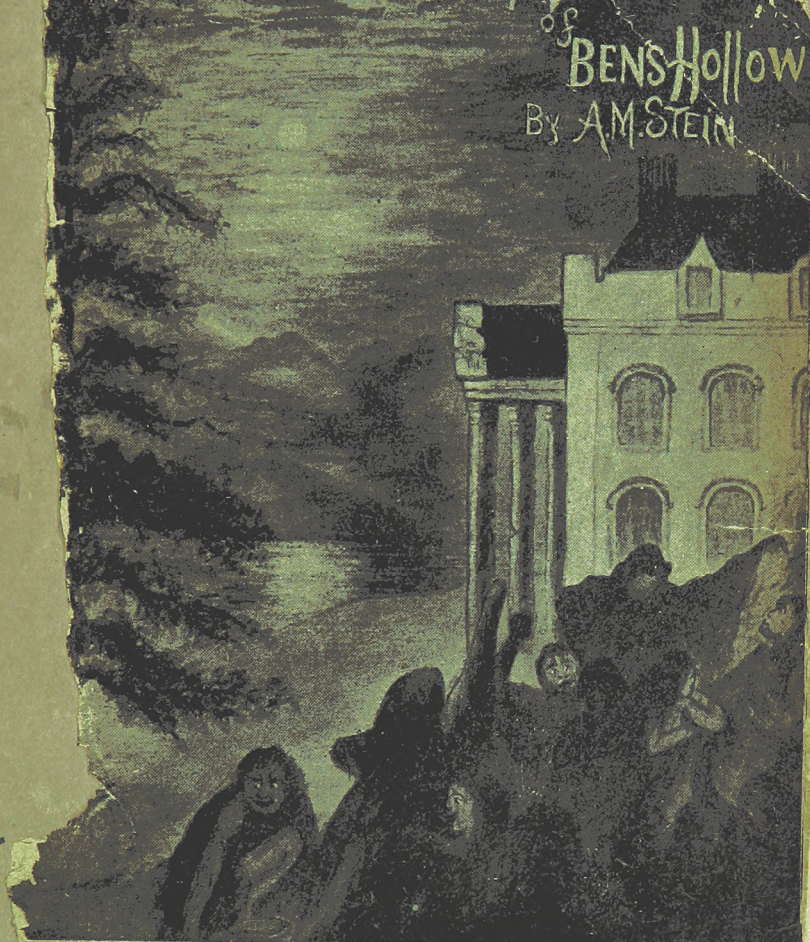


PRICE ONE SHILLING.

HAUNTED HOUSE

of BENS HOLLOW
By A.M. STEIN



London: JAMES ELLIOTT & Co., Temple Chambers, Falcon Court, Fleet Street

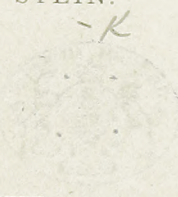
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THE
HAUNTED HOUSE OF BEN'S HOLLOW
AND
OTHER GHOSTLY STORIES.



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London :
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THE Haunted House of Ben's Hollow.

IN THREE PARTS.

PART I.—THE CARMAN'S STORY.

CHAPTER I.

It was in the dusk of evening that we first saw the old house known as "Ben's Hollow," and my friend Jack Masters always declared that this fact fully accounted for the vague sense of horror which we both experienced as we looked down upon its dilapidated portico, broken windows, and garden overgrown with rank grass and tall weeds. A more dismal-looking place it would be difficult to imagine, or one more suited to be the scene of some great crime. It lay in a hollow between two low hills, and was so surrounded by trees that we seemed to come upon it quite suddenly and unexpectedly, as the road we were driving along took a sudden sharp turn round the spur of one of the hills.

There was a small dark-looking lake about 300 yards from the house, and the hills were the barest and bleakest-looking I ever saw, with jagged tops like the teeth of a saw. We had just crossed a large bog, and the sudden change to the hills and the lake was most unexpected.

My friend and I were on a sketching tour through Ireland, and we had chosen our present route through the west country, as much out of the beaten track as possible. We had been "dodging" about as the fancy took us, and were now on our way to a small country town where we intended to put up for the night. Our car driver, a very loquacious young specimen of the Emerald Isle, had been entertaining us with numerous stories about all the places we had passed. So remarkable a house as this was sure to have a story attached to it, so I said to the driver—

"Tim Kelly, my man, what's the story you can tell us about this old house? It looks quite a fair-sized place, and surely worthy of a better fate than to be left to the rats and owls. Who does it belong to?"

"Is it the story of the ould house you'd be after knowing? Sure, thin, it's meeself can tell you that, for me own grandmother was own sister to Mary Machree that was nurse-girl to his honour, Captain McMurrough, the last of his name that lived there, and it's many's the ghost that she's seen there."

My friend Jack Masters gave a great "snort" of contempt at the mention of ghosts. "I knew there'd be a ghost somewhere about the place," he said. "I never knew a dirty old house that hadn't a ghost of some kind—if the place was only dirty enough and shabby enough! What's this one up to? Eh! Waving a white sheet about and howling, I suppose. Rather an idiotic way to spend one's time, even if you are a ghost, I should say."

"Ah! sure it's more than that thim ghosts is up to," said Tim Kelly, lowering his voice and glancing cautiously and fearfully around; "and it's maybe just as well to be careful what you're afther saying of thim sort of people."

Jack laughed at this, and was about to try to take what he called "a rise" out of Kelly. But I, being anxious to hear Tim's story, stopped him, and after a little pressing Kelly told us the following narrative, which he interspersed with so many reflections of his own, and so much of his grandmother's opinions on every possible subject, that I think it will be more intelligible if I tell it in my own words.

It seems, then, that the house we had passed had been built in Oliver Cromwell's time by a man named Ben or Benjamin Holdfast, one of his troopers, to whom the land had been given as a reward for services rendered during the invasion of Ireland. This man had settled down on his property, ruling his tenants with a rod of iron, and making himself most unpopular everywhere. He died somewhat suddenly—not without suspicion of having been poisoned—leaving one son and a daughter. The son died in childhood, and the daughter grew up and married one of the neighbouring squireens of the name of McMurrough, and her descendants continued to occupy the house and estate known as "Ben's Hollow" for several generations—marrying amongst the original Irish families, and becoming in the course of time, as thoroughly Irish as though Ben Holdfast had never had the honour of being their forefather. In the year 1798 the property had passed into the possession of a certain Martin McMurrough, who, with his twin-brother John, were the

sole representatives of that branch of the family. Martin, as the eldest, had inherited the house and estate; while John had been left with a small amount of cash for his share. He very soon lost this in the dissipations of fashionable life in Dublin, and before long he was deeply in debt, without the means or desire of earning an honest living for himself. In this state of affairs he used to brood over the injustice, as he considered it, of his brother's enjoying the sole benefit of the family property—a brother who was his elder by so short a time, too—and from thinking what a benefit to himself the death of that brother would be, he came to thinking at last that there might be some way of getting rid of Martin without becoming a murderer in actual deed, though at heart he was one already. He and Martin had never been fond of one another even as boys, and they were as different as possible in character and appearance. Martin was gay, easy-tempered, and frank; while John was silent, dour, suspicious, and very grasping, and seemed to have inherited the cruel and unscrupulous character attributed to the original Ben Holdfast, the stories of whose oppressions were still told and shuddered at by the peasantry.

John had not long to wait for his chance. It seemed as though fate and his evil genius had opened up to him a way of getting rid of Martin without any danger to himself. Martin had joined some of those secret societies known as the "Whiteboys," "Ribbonmen," &c., which were so plentiful all over Ireland, and Ben's Hollow was a place where their secret meetings were often held. John also belonged to the society, but living as he did in Dublin, and only coming to see his brother at times, he was not so well known to the local members, though his relationship to Martin, in whose confidence he was, enabled him to learn all their secrets.

Now it occurred to John that a very easy and safe way to dispose of Martin would be to betray him to the Government, in which case he would most likely be hanged, even if he were not shot in attempting to escape, and in any case he would lose his property, which he, John, could arrange to receive as payment for betraying the society.

I suppose John must have felt some scruples about taking such a course, and no doubt he hesitated for some time over it, but his necessities and his hatred of Martin were equally great, and I daresay he even told himself that he was doing

his country a patriotic service in giving up these rebels to the English Government; but anyhow he contrived to satisfy his conscience, or at least to smother it sufficiently to allow him to give the information which sent a party of soldiers down to Ben's Hollow on an expedition to arrest Martin and his friends when they were holding one of their secret meetings. A sharp resistance was offered, but they were so completely taken by surprise that they were at once overpowered, and in the scuffle Martin was shot, and his body carried into the best bedroom, where it lay in great state tiil the funeral, being "waked" in the most approved fashion of the time. Tim Kelly said, "There nivver was such a foine wake, and the whiskey that was drunk was of the best, and without any stint at all, at all." John was most liberal in all the arrangements, and sent word that he wanted all respect shown to his poor brother's remains; but he excused himself from coming to the funeral on the ground that he was too ill to travel, and so poor Martin was buried in the family vault with all due honours, and John reigned in his stead.

John stayed in Dublin for nearly a year, and then sent word quite unexpectedly that he was about to come at last to live in his own house, and would be down the next week. John had always been of such a very unsociable nature that his arrival with a large party of friends was a matter of some surprise. A queer set of friends they were, too—the noisiest and most reckless of his Dublin associates—and for over a month they kept it up in fine style at Ben's Hollow. Such hunting and shooting, and eating and drinking as went on! you would have thought that poor Martin had come to life again, and they were feasting over his return, instead of him being not dead quite a year, and, as Tim Kelly remarked, "scarce settled like in his grave."

John McMurrough seemed to have a strange dislike to being left alone; so great indeed was his antipathy to solitude that he even got one of his friends to share his room with him. Well, one night between five and six weeks after John and his friends came to Ben's Hollow, when as usual they had spent a jolly evening, and had all gone or been carried up to bed—"just between one and two o'clock in the morning," said Tim—the whole household were awakened by the most awful noise, like a lot of men swearing and fighting, and guns going off, and things rattling about as if the place were





besieged. It happened that that night was the anniversary of Martin's death, but no one remembered it or thought of it until afterwards.

Of course the guests who were not too drunk to stand rushed out of their rooms to see what was the matter. Some went downstairs and through the rooms, but nothing was to be seen, nothing was disturbed, no strange men were found in the house, nor any outside, and yet even while they were searching the noise began again, right in the midst of the guests themselves. They heard loud, angry voices, the trampling of many feet, the sound of shots, and then a deep groan and a wild shriek. Everyone heard it; then all of a sudden a cold wind seemed to sweep through the house, though it was in the month of August, and a close, hot night, and the frightened guests who were standing in the hall saw the door of their host's room open suddenly and violently, and John McMurrough rushed—or rather, as it seemed to them, was dragged, out—struggling and fighting violently with a tall figure in a sort of black cloak; a tall figure that looked “in a way solid,” said Tim, and yet they could see the walls and doors through him. It was like a great black shadow rather than a real man. Well, these two figures came out on to the top of the stairs, wrestling and struggling in their horrible death struggle, while in the doorway of John's room stood the friend who shared the room with him, ghastly white and scared, speechless with terror, but making vain efforts to speak. Then all of a sudden it seemed as if the black shadow got all round McMurrough, and lifted him up and threw him right over the railing down into the hall, where he fell with a sickening thud at the feet of the horrified guests. At that moment the black shadow vanished, the noises ceased, and nothing was there but the dead man lying at their feet with his neck broken, and a most awful look of horror on his face.

The friend who slept in John's room said afterwards that he had been wakened by something moving about the room, and had then seen the tall figure standing beside McMurrough's bed. He seemed to be speaking to him, but he could not hear what was said, and then McMurrough tried to get out of bed and away from the tall man, and then they began fighting—and it was all over before he could do anything.

Of course there was an inquest, and the story of the tall man was repeated, but as he had vanished when McMurrough

fell over the stair rails, the jury and many people came to the conclusion that McMurrough had been drinking and got delirium tremens, and thrown himself over, and that the others, who were probably not too sober themselves, had imagined all the rest. This explanation satisfied everyone except those who had been present, who all declared that they had most certainly heard the strange noises and seen the dark figure, and they always stood out that there could be no mistake at all—what they had heard and seen was no delusion.

John McMurrough was buried in the family vault beside Martin, and the property passed into the hands of an obscure cousin, who belonged to a distant branch of the McMurroughs. This cousin lived in France, his native talent for getting into debt having rendered his retirement to the Continent advisable. As Martin and John had both contrived to mortgage the estate pretty deeply, there was not enough left to pay off the new heir's own very considerable debts and enable him to return to Ireland, so he continued to live abroad, and the estate was managed by an agent for some years. An attempt was made to let the house, but no one seemed to fancy it, and the only tenant who did at last take it left in a short time, saying that there were so many unpleasant noises it was not fit to live in.

For twenty years or more the house stood empty, and then Ben's Hollow had a fresh owner in the person of a Captain McMurrough, the son of the distant cousin, "and a foine gentleman he was," Kelly said. He had served in the army abroad, married a French lady of fortune, and was now coming with his wife to pay a visit to his ancestral home. Great were the preparations made for their arrival. The house was cleaned from top to bottom. Painters and paperhangers were got in to brighten it up, and by the time Captain McMurrough and his wife and servants arrived it was like a new place, so bright and cheerful did it look.

The Captain had one child, a daughter, and he brought over a fine-looking Frenchwoman as maid to his wife and head nurse to the child, and Tim Kelly's grand-aunt was engaged as nurse-girl at Ben's Hollow, and it was from her that he knew all about the disturbances in Captain McMurrough's time.

At first everything was quiet, and there were no signs of ghosts. The large room, that had been the state bedroom

where Martin and John had both lain in state and been "waked," was shut up. In going over the house, Madame had taken a strong dislike to this room. She said it seemed cold and damp, and gave her a "frisson," so it was shut up, and she and her husband occupied another large room at the back of the house. The county families called, and there were balls and dinners and visitings, so Madame found the place quite lively, and was well satisfied in her new home; and then, just when no one was thinking of them, the ghosts began their disturbances again. Heavy articles of furniture would be carried out of one room into another. Feet would be heard coming up the stairs and walking about the rooms when no one was to be seen, and many other sounds common to such cases of hauntings. But as these things did no harm, Captain McMurrough refused to be turned out of his house by them, and so for eight or nine months this state of things went on. The household were afraid to go about alone, or sleep by themselves, but they became in a sense quite used to the noises and did not mind them.

Suddenly the hauntings took a new and more alarming form. It was now the month of July, and the comparatively harmless noises were succeeded by a perfect pandemonium of loud, mocking laughter, and heavy tramlings as of a score of men hurrying up and down the rooms and staircases. Then doors were violently opened and shut, loud knocks were heard, then sounds as of someone groaning and sighing. This went on for several days. The servants talked of leaving, and Madame herself begged the Captain to take her away. He refused for some time, and talked loudly of finding out and punishing the rogues who were creating all this annoyance, but all his efforts were in vain. He not only watched by himself, but got several of his friends in the neighbourhood to help him; but though the noises, laughter, and groans still continued, it seemed impossible to find out how they were made.

August came, and on the tenth of that month the Captain, with a couple of officers from the County Barracks, resolved to sit up all night and watch. The tenth being the anniversary of the death of both Martin and John McMurrough of tragic memory, it was suggested that the ghosts were likely to make some special disturbance, as it was reported in the neighbourhood that on that date Ben's Hollow had for years

past shown strange signs of life when no one was living there. People passing on the high roads had seen lights in the windows and heard many loud and singular noises, and it was felt that now, if ever, was the time to detect the authors of these seemingly unaccountable things.

Captain McMurrough, his two military friends, and Mr. O'Brien, a local squire, arranged to sit up and watch. They were all well armed, and let it be understood that whoever or whatever was seen would get a bullet into it or him, to begin with. They were to station themselves, one upstairs on the landing, where the noises were usually the loudest, one in the front hall, and the other two in the dining room, and whoever heard or saw anything of a really alarming nature was to fire and the others would at once hurry to his assistance. Madame McMurrough and the child and servants had been sent in the afternoon to the agent's house, about a mile away. The Captain and his friends carefully locked and barred all the doors and windows, pocketed the keys, searched every nook and corner to guard against the possibility of concealed intruders, and then settled down to their watch.

All was quiet till between one and two o'clock, and then they heard most distinctly the sounds of a fight, loud shouts, sharp cries, and then pistol shots, so close that a regular battle seemed to be going on all around them. They rushed with one consent into the hall, where the noise was loudest and though they saw nothing they felt themselves pushed and thumped by unseen hands, and were conscious of a crowd of people hurrying and struggling round them. Then, all at once, the door of the "Haunted Room," as it was called, was burst violently open, although they had carefully locked it and the key was in McMurrough's pocket, and two figures, just as they had been described nearly thirty years before, came fighting and wrestling out of the room on to the landing; then one seemed to throw the other over, and they saw him fall at their feet. So solid and real did the fallen man look that they bent over him to raise him; his eyes seemed to look up at them in agony, and his lips to move as if speaking, and yet when two of them tried to lift him their hands went through and through the figure, and it seemed to shrink up and vanish gradually and slowly away before their eyes, while the other sounds suddenly ceased.

Considerably startled and puzzled, the four gentlemen

agreed that two of them should remain in the hall, while the others searched the haunted room. Accordingly Captain McMurrough and Mr. O'Brien went upstairs, and the Captain took the key from his pocket and tried the door. It was still shut and locked exactly as they had left it. The Captain opened it, and while O'Brien searched the room the Captain stood at the door to see that no one came out of it. A strict search revealed nothing. There was clearly no one there, and yet as Mr. O'Brien went from place to place a heavy footstep kept following him, and they were both startled by a low chuckling laugh, now close to them and again far off in a corner of the room. While they were thus trying to find what caused these sounds, loud cries of "Help! help!" from one of their friends in the hall made them rush out and down the stairs, where a strange sight met their eyes.

Lieutenant Bennett was lying helpless on the floor, while Major Myers was struggling with a rather short, broad, powerful-looking man, dressed in the style of one of Cromwell's celebrated Ironsides. The Major seemed almost exhausted, and his cries for help were already growing quite faint. To reach forward and grasp the figure was the work of an instant. Captain McMurrough was ahead of his friend, and got hold of the man first, and as he felt what a solid, real figure it was, he made sure he had at last found the author of these disturbances. He had his loaded pistol in one hand, and as he seized the man with the other, he put the muzzle of his weapon to the figure's head and fired. The bullet passed through the head, and at the same time a wild, mocking laugh rang out through the hall, and the figure turned round a horrible, evil-looking face, and looked full at McMurrough. At this instant O'Brien, who was on the stair, fired his pistol, and his shot too passed through the figure and went into the wall, where it was found the next day. At that moment, and while McMurrough and O'Brien were actually touching the figure, it melted away in their grasp and vanished, as the man they had seen fall over the bannisters had done, and where it had stood there was nothing. As for Major Myers he was so exhausted with the struggle he had gone through that he was sitting dazed and help'less, while poor Lieutenant Bennett seemed to be in a sort of fit.

In these circumstances a retreat from the house was the only course to be taken, so Bennett was carried down to the

house of the agent, Mr. Murphy, where Madame McMurrough and the servants were, and a doctor at once sent for. In spite of all that could be done, Bennett continued to pass from one fit of convulsions into another for some hours, and at last fell into a deep, death-like trance, in which he lay for two days, waking at last very weak, but otherwise fortunately restored to his normal state. He, it seems, had neither seen nor heard anything. He had felt a cold wind pass over him and a sort of shivering seize him, and he had then become unconscious and knew nothing till he awakened from his trance. Major Myers said that he, too, had felt the cold wind, and at the same time a vague sense of horror and dread overcame him such as he had never experienced in his life before, though he had fought and distinguished himself in several battles and faced death many times. The fear he felt was of some kind quite different from the fear of death. It was more a nameless horror of some terrible unknown thing, that he felt closing round him, and could neither see nor resist. He had looked round at his friend, and had seen him slide rather than fall upon the floor, as though he had gone to sleep, and as he took a step forward to touch and rouse Bennett he suddenly found himself face to face with the evil-looking creature seen also by McMurrough and O'Brien when they came to his assistance. He at once seized this man (as he thought him), and to his touch he had seemed as real and solid as he did to McMurrough and O'Brien's, and yet they had fired two shots right through him, and he had vanished even while they were looking at and holding him. With this figure it was that Myers had struggled, while it made every effort to get at his throat and strangle him with his long, claw-like fingers, Myers growing more and more strangely weak and exhausted, while the horrid face was close to his and the awful eyes were glaring at him. He said he felt, and could feel, no doubt of the reality of these things, nor, he declared, could anything human have vanished from them as this thing had done; and, for his part, nothing would tempt him to sleep another night in the place. McMurrough and the other two felt a similar disinclination to pass another night under that roof, so when Madame added her persuasions and declared that any attempt to return to Ben's Hollow would kill her, the Captain was rather glad to avail himself of the excuse and abandon

the house. For, in truth, he had for a long time been more shaken and perplexed by what he had both heard and seen than he had cared to admit.

So Captain McMurrough and his family went abroad, and Ben's Hollow was shut up once more. One or two bold people tried to live there and defy the ghosts, whom they scoffed at, but they invariably left in a week or two, sometimes sooner, so at last the furniture was sold and only a few old things of no value were left to moulder away undisturbed. It was accepted as a fact that Ben's Hollow was "troubled," and no one could live there.

PART II.—THE ARTIST'S STORY.

CHAPTER II.

Tim Kelly's story had taken so long in telling that as he finished we drove up to the door of the little inn in the small town of M——. It was a shabby, dirty little town, like most of the small country towns in Ireland; but it was all the more picturesque for that, and as the little hotel proved clean and comfortable we resolved to stay some days and explore the neighbourhood, and amongst other things we agreed to pay a visit to the haunted house. The marvellous always had a great charm for me, and as for Jack Masters, he was bent on proving that Kelly's story was all "bosh," and offered to settle any ghosts that might visit him. Accordingly we called next day upon the agent, and, after a little talk with him, he gave us the keys, and with them permission to spend a night or two in the house if we wished. At the same time he warned us that the story we had heard was well authenticated, and it was a fact that everyone who had tried—as we were going to try—to stay at Ben's Hollow had been very glad to get out of it again. Jack was much entertained by the agent's serious manner, and said it only made him the more bent on staying in the house, for one night at all events.

We took with us a couple of revolvers, some candles and matches, and a couple of strong walking-sticks—some newspapers to read, and a basket of provisions and a bottle of

wine, and walked over to Ben's Hollow about seven o'clock in the evening, after a good dinner at the inn. As it was in September the days were long, and when we arrived there was plenty of light to see all through the house.

It was a large, rambling old place of two storeys, and had been added at various times, which made the architecture peculiar. There was no furniture in it except a few old chairs and tables, an old sideboard, and a few things in the bedrooms. Jack and I explored all the rooms and locked all the doors, taking the keys down to the dining-room, which opened off the hall, and in which we intended to spend the night. We brought a couple of chairs and a table into this room, and, as the house felt damp and mouldy, we collected some turf and logs of wood and lighted a fire in the old-fashioned grate. Then we lighted our candles, and, leaving the matches handy, we began our watch.

As I have said, the room was empty of furniture except an old sideboard and the chairs and table we had brought into it. There were several very villainous old portraits on the walls, and a large mirror over the sideboard which was cracked from top to bottom. The room was wainscoted in dark oak, and there was a handsome carved mantelpiece and a queer old grate. The shutters were fastened, and we resolved to shut the door.

For some hours we sat and read, and as nothing happened Jack suggested we might as well have some refreshment, so we got out our food and bottle of wine. Jack took a walk round the room to see that all was right, and also looked into the hall, where we had left a light burning. As he returned we both distinctly heard a footstep following him. Jack said it was "an echo," of course, whereupon there was a low laugh and a sound as if someone had clapped his hands. Jack declared this must be a "trick" and he was quite prepared for that sort of thing, but he looked uneasily round and also pulled out his watch to see the time. It was 18 minutes past 12 o'clock.

We sat down to table, and were just beginning to eat, when the door opened and shut and a chair was pushed, or rather it glided along the floor of itself, up to the table, and stopped between us. There was no one visible, and the chair was one of those we had seen upstairs. Jack at once got up and hit the seat a great bang with his stick, and immediately

the stick was twisted out of his hand, broken in two, and thrown on the floor, while again sounded that low, chuckling laugh. We were both startled, but resolved to act as if nothing had happened, and began our supper. Jack had his back to the fire, which was burning brightly, and I sat opposite to him, while the mysterious chair was placed at the table with its back to the windows and facing the broken mirror. As we began to eat we saw a hand—a man's hand and wrist, nothing more—lift up a plate and throw it on the floor. Then one thing after the other was thrown, some almost striking us, till everything was removed from the table. Jack grasped one candlestick and I held on to the other to save them from going. As I did so I happened to turn and look in the mirror, and there I saw the most awful face imaginable—so malignant, so evil, no words can describe it. I cried out to Jack to look, and he too saw the face. As we looked it laughed, and a horrid laugh ran through the room, and appeared to be echoed through the house; while a cold icy wind seemed to freeze our blood and almost deprive us of the power to move. Then the candlesticks were wrenched from our grasp, and the room suddenly seemed to fill with dark forms, which as suddenly vanished again, and then, by the light of the fire, which still burned in the grate, we saw a dark figure in a large cloak standing by the hearth. I tried to speak, but I could neither move nor utter a sound, and only felt an awful nameless sense of oppression and horror stealing over me, joined to a wild desire to leave the place. I could feel hands passed over my head and face, and a heavy sense of weight, as of something large folding itself round me like a great coil and rendering me helpless. Then I heard, as in a dream, Jack's voice saying, "Who and what are you? What do you want? Speak, or I fire," he added, pointing his revolver at the figure. Again that horrid laugh came as an answer, and Jack fired. The bullet passed right through the ghost, and with a wild cry it clutched at Jack's throat. As it did so the dark shadows of its form seemed to envelop my friend, and he fell senseless on the floor. I made a frantic effort to move, and as I did so I felt the spell that bound me suddenly broken, and seizing my friend I half dragged, half carried, him into the open air, the unearthly laughter following me, and being echoed by a dozen other voices through the empty rooms.

Once out of the house, Jack soon revived, but we neither of us felt inclined to return to the place again, so we walked over to M——, and took a stroll about the town till it was time for breakfast. We decided that after all our boastful talk it would never do to say how we had left the haunted house, so we sent the keys back to the agent by a boy, and saying that business would require us to leave M—— at once, we beat as graceful a retreat as the circumstances permitted.

What it was we had seen and felt I was unable to determine to my own satisfaction. Jack Masters stood out stoutly that he could explain it all—that it was simply a case of our hypnotising each other, or some such thing—but, all the same, he grew very cross if I alluded to “Ben’s Hollow,” and the subject was always a sore one. For my own part I can only say that, like Major Myers and the others who at different times had interviewed the ghosts at “Ben’s Hollow,” I concluded that such experiences were more strange than agreeable, and I certainly had no desire to repeat mine.

I little thought, however, how important a part in my life this old house would play, nor how its strange history was to be worked into my own. How little, indeed, do we know of those mysterious causes which rule and shape our destinies in spite of our own wills! Some slight event causes us to go to a certain place on a given day at a given hour, and from that one visit there springs a train of events that change and make or mar our whole future lives. This in our blind ignorance we call Chance, and think in our pride that it was within our limited powers to have avoided the train of events.

CHAPTER III.

During the winter which followed our visit to Ireland, Jack and I were both fairly successful in the pursuit of our art. Jack got a berth on one of the illustrated papers that kept him busy and paid him well. Drawing was his strong point, and his vigorous studies in black and white had gained him





quite a reputation in Paris, where we had been students together.

My forte was colouring; warm, soft bright colouring was my delight, and I confess that it was my dream to be able to visit the South of France and Italy, and to draw my inspirations from the sunny brightness of those lovely countries, so rich in scenery and romance.

When, therefore, Jack and I found ourselves with quite a nice little surplus, over and above our requirements for our daily expenses, we resolved that our holiday trip should extend through the South of France and Italy, and, if possible, we would try to see Rome itself.

Jack arranged to send the results of his wanderings to his paper, in the shape of "Holiday Rambles," while I intended to work up some subjects for the next Academy and other exhibitions, so that we should not find our trip altogether unprofitable.

Jack and I had "chummed" together for nearly five years now. We met in Paris as fellow-pupils in the atelier of the celebrated painter, M——, and had felt drawn together from the first day. Jack was three years my junior, and was the son of a London barrister in good practice. His father made him a liberal allowance, and as he was a bright, genial, talkative young man, with plenty of animal spirits, a keen sense of fun, and a great enthusiasm for his art, he was a general favourite at the studio. He had fair hair, bright blue eyes, a handsome face, and a tall, well-proportioned figure, and was, indeed, a fair specimen of the athletic, sport-loving youth of Great Britain. This present life was so full of enjoyment to him that he felt little interest in the idea of any other, and he treated all stories of the supernatural as wild fables, quite beneath the notice of any man in his sane senses. How, then, we came to be such friends is a mystery to me, for we were in most characteristics as opposite as the poles, and yet the friendship between us was real and deep. Our appearance was as different as our characters and fortunes. He was rich and prosperous, while I had struggled from my earliest years with poverty and all the petty worries poverty brings.

My father, an officer in the East India Company's service, had been killed in the Cabul massacre, leaving my poor mother alone, with me, her only child. Theirs had been a runaway match, and my father had possessed almost nothing of his own

to leave us, so we had to live on the very slender pension which my mother received as his widow, and it was a constant struggle to make ends meet.

When I was ten years old my poor mother died, and I was taken charge of by my paternal grandfather, who sent me to a large grammar school in the South of England, where I spent most of my holidays, only paying a formal visit to my grandfather once a year. When I grew up he obtained a situation for me in a merchant's office at a salary of £80 a year, and then told me that now I was started in life and need expect no further aid from him. My father, he said, had married in opposition to his wishes, and he did not consider that the son of such a marriage had any claim. With myself he had no fault to find, and if I liked to pay him a visit at any time he would be pleased to see me and hear how I was getting on, but I need not look for any further help from him, nor think he would leave me anything in his will. He had a large family of sons and daughters and their children to provide for, and it was "to the children of those who had been dutiful to him that he intended to leave his money."

There was not much love lost between my grandfather and myself, and I need hardly say that I did not trouble him often with my visits.

I remained in that office four years—long, weary years they—and then my longing for art and an artist's life grew so strong that I resolved to give up my situation and devote myself to painting.

This was the last straw to my grandfather. He wrote me a most indignant letter when he learned from his friend, the merchant, what I had done, and told me that henceforth he washed his hands of me and my concerns for ever—a proceeding that did not afflict me much, I am bound to say.

Then began for me a long struggle with poverty. I had saved some money, though not much, from my £80 a year, during the years of my office drudgery, and had contrived also to attend a night class for students at the studio of a very good painter near Fitzroy Square, and at the end of my four years I got the offer (through one of my fellow students) of an appointment as drawing-master to a young ladies' school at Bayswater. This appointment, though small, was something certain, and after a time I secured work, drawing designs for illustrations in one of the "penny dreadfuls." In this

way I contrived to live and, after a time, to save a little. As soon as I felt I could risk it, I went to Paris to study, and again I was fortunate enough to find work in illustrating cheap books and papers. Thus I was able to earn a living and, at the same time continue my studies under good masters; but it was terribly hard work, I confess. Here Jack and I first met. I don't think I am very sociable by nature, and it was Jack who made the first advances, and his frank, cordial disposition did the rest. He had a charm for me that none of the other students possessed, and before we had worked together a fortnight at the atelier we had become quite intimate friends.

I don't suppose anyone before or since ever knew so much of my private history as Jack did in the first month, and I soon found myself making him the hero in all my pictures and dreams.

He was very tall and big and fair. I am only between five feet eight and five feet nine, and am dark and sallow. Nature has given me health and strength, and I am athletic and active, but must admit that I am not handsome, and have no claims to that charm of manner which so often takes the place of good looks—a charm, moreover, which Jack possessed in a high degree. Jack was easy-tempered, rather careless, and ready to forgive or forget anything; indeed, I sometimes thought he forgot too easily, while I am somewhat passionate and find it hard to either forgive or forget a slight or an injury, and I can neither love nor hate in a quiet fashion.

I am also fond of the mysterious, the unknown, and all forms of so-called superstition in all countries have a great charm for me, and even at that time I had an intense desire to enquire into occult subjects, had I possessed the necessary time and money. What then was the attraction between us I cannot tell. I know as little as a man of science or a chemist knows what causes the attraction between certain chemicals or metals; I only know the attraction existed, and that it seemed equally strong on both sides.

For three years we studied together in Paris, and then Jack's father died suddenly. It was found that far from being so rich as was supposed he had been living up to his income, and beyond some furniture and about £4,000, he had left nothing. Jack had two sisters, both well married and settled in the country, and when the furniture and other

property came to be realised, the share of each did not amount to very much. Jack resolved, therefore, to return to London and start making money on his own account, and I, of course, his faithful shadow, returned with him. We took lodgings together and shared a studio in the next street, and there for two years patiently worked our way towards fame and fortune, and had so far succeeded that we now felt able to treat ourselves to quite an extensive trip abroad during our holidays.

We travelled first to Paris—had a look round there—and then went by easy stages to Lyons and Marseilles, then crossed into Italy, and made our way to the picturesque old city of Genoa, where we intended to remain a short time, as it afforded so many fine opportunities for sketching, and there was so much that was interesting to see.

We had spent three delightful days exploring this most quaint of cities, without making a single sketch—there was so much to sketch we did not know where to begin. It was the evening of the third day. We were on our way back to the hotel after a walk through one of the lovely suburbs of Genoa, and were passing the Church of the Annunciata, when the approach of a procession of the “confraternità,” who were engaged in performing their pious offices for the dead, caused us to turn into the church to escape the crowd in the narrow street, and once inside, the beauty of the building made us wander round, examining the paintings, sculpture, and monumental tablets. I was standing near the high altar, in front of one of the fine windows, trying to read the Latin inscription under it, when Jack attracted my attention by touching my arm and whispering, “Look, Dick! did you ever see a prettier girl than that? She is just the model I want for my new picture. How I wish she would keep still while I try to sketch her!”

I looked round and saw the object of his admiration, who was contemplating the altar with much attention—glancing occasionally at a guide-book she held in her hand—evidently a stranger like ourselves. Standing there with the light from the windows falling on her, the dim, mysterious arches of the church fading away in the growing darkness, and framing her slight figure with their dark background, she made a charming picture—a picture that I have often seen in my dreams since; a picture that rises now as I

write, and I see again the cool, dim church, with its sprinkling of worshippers dotted about like dark specks—the gorgeous altar with its rows of flickering candles, and the fair, slight figure of the girl standing before it—and ourselves, whose lives that fair girl was to influence so wonderfully, watching her—all of us unconscious of the part each was to play in the destiny of the other.

She was about middle height, rather slight, with golden brown hair, small features, and a fair, delicate complexion. She had a small, well-shaped head, and that graceful, well-proportioned figure that made Jack notice her. A pretty girl, truly, and yet I had seen many quite as pretty, and none of them had cost me a second thought. Why, then, did my heart give such a sudden start at the sight of this stranger? What was the reason that my blood rushed through my veins, and that I felt a wild impulse to follow her and find out who she was, and where she lived? I know not. I only know that it was so, and that I, who had laughed hitherto at others in love as weak fools, had now unconsciously to myself fallen suddenly and violently in love with this girl whom I now saw for the first time.

What is that mysterious affinity which makes us often turn to a complete stranger as to an old friend, which, more wonderful still, can waken the master passion of our souls at the sight of one whose very name is even unknown? Is it the fore-knowledge of a life that is yet before us where we shall be all in all to each other, and in which all those longings and aspirations that are as yet but shadows shall be realised? Is it the recognition that has come to twin souls that now at last meet and long for reunion? In this life, alas! their hope is too often disappointed, but for those who have thus met and thus loved on earth there is, there must be reunion in that other and higher life beyond the grave and Gate of Death.

As I now looked at this fair stranger, I was only conscious of an anxiety to learn who she was. The reason I was so anxious I did not even guess, and had anyone told me that I had fallen in love I should have been most indignant. I suppose some instinct must have made her conscious that we were watching her (the same feeling, no doubt, that makes two people in the street turn to look after each other), for she turned round, and catching us both in the act of staring

and Jack trying to make a sketch of her, she blushed deeply, and, in her hurry to go away, she dropped her parasol. I stepped forward quickly to pick it up, saying as I handed it to her, "Pardon us for staring at you, but you were so absorbed, and you made such a pretty picture in this old church that we could not resist watching you." The girl blushed again, and bowing slightly, took her parasol and hurried from the church. Somehow, my interest in the building had gone, too, and I longed to follow her, but I felt that to do so would be almost an insult, and not for worlds would I have done that.

How I hoped we should meet again! How I looked at every figure like hers as we explored the old town during the next few days. Alas! I never saw her, and began to fear that she had left Genoa, and that we should not meet again, when chance or destiny brought us once more together, and this time made us known to each other.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a few days after our meeting with the pretty girl in the church, that on returning to our hotel we found that some friends we had known in Paris were now in Genoa. They had called during our absence, and had left us invitations to spend the next evening with them. They expected a few friends, and there would be music and dancing. Jack accepted at once, as he was fond of parties, and, after a slight hesitation, I agreed to go with him, in the hope, shall I confess, of meeting again my fair unknown. That we should meet again I felt almost certain, and my one idea was to look for her wherever I went. I felt terribly ashamed of my folly, but yet I could not keep my thoughts from her image.

The rooms were already crowded when we arrived at the Villa Fabrini, where our friends were staying. Someone was playing the violin when we reached the door of the salon, so we remained outside till the music ceased, watching the groups of guests, and I, for my part, seeking for a glimpse of the girl whose image so haunted me.

As my eyes glanced over a group by the window, I started and turned pale, for there, indeed, she was, talking to a small, dark Italian, who was fanning her gently with her fan and looking unutterable things out of his soft, dark eyes.

This sight made me most unreasonably angry, and I determined to get my hostess to introduce me at the earliest opportunity. What the music was I do not know, I scarcely heard it. I could only think of those two by the window.

She wore a dress of some soft, bluish-grey stuff, with a few dark crimson roses which relieved its paleness, and became well the delicacy of her complexion.

Jack had not noticed her yet, and I did not feel anxious to point her out. He had just discovered someone he knew, and slipped away to speak to him after we had paid our respects to our hostess, while I asked Madame de Marteville (our friend) to present me to her fair guest, and in a few moments I was bowing to her and hearing, as in a dream, Madame saying, "Allow me, Miss Challoner, to present to you my friend, Monsieur Richard Harden, an artist of whom we expect great things, and who is anxious to make your acquaintance."

And then I saw Miss Challoner blush, and lift her soft grey-blue eyes to mine with an amused expression, as she returned my bow, saying—

"Mr. Harden and I have met before, I believe, though we had not the honour of an introduction, and I think I have seen his pictures. Are you not the Mr. Harden who painted that lovely picture of the 'Last Adieux' in the Academy this year?"

I replied that I was, and that it gave me much pleasure to know that she had noticed it, and then we drifted into general conversation, and her Italian admirer, feeling himself rather out of his element as he did not speak English, had no choice but to retire, leaving me to take possession of his place.

That evening was like a bright dream to me. What we said I hardly know, but I found myself talking as I never had done to anyone before. She had travelled much, and mixed with clever people, and possessed those receptive faculties that enabled her to remember and understand what she had heard and seen. She was frank without being fast or forward, and clever without that constant striving after saying

"smart" things with which so many clever women (and men) spoil the wit of what they do say by making us feel that it is forced.

She set me at my ease at once by the perfect "naturalness" of her manner. I am not a ladies' man, and, as a rule, am rather inclined to avoid women. Never having had any sisters of my own, I don't profess to understand them, and am often at a loss what to talk about; yet, strange to say, with this young girl—a complete stranger—I felt no trouble in finding subjects of conversation. I had almost said she seemed to read my thoughts, for she often answered them before I spoke.

Our tête-à-tête was interrupted by the announcement of supper, so I offered my arm to my fair companion and took her into the supper-room, and on our way down we met Jack Masters with a stout matron on his arm, whom he had been deputed to look after. He started when he saw us, and Miss Challoner remarked, with a little laugh: "That surely is the gentleman who was with you in the church the other day—the gentleman who was trying to sketch me. I hope it was not for something comic. He, too, is an artist, I suppose?" I replied he was, and as I looked after him, a jealous pang shot through me as I thought that he too would come to know her—he, too, might grow to love her. Alas! if so, what chance had I beside him? He was so handsome, so much admired by all the ladies, and he was always falling in love with someone, and as often falling out again; but then with Miss Challoner it was surely impossible that if he once loved her he could change. She was so wonderful in my eyes, that like all who are in love, I believed that everyone must love her also, and it was with dread that I thought of Jack's meeting her. All my new-found happiness vanished. There was dancing after supper, and though we danced together three times, and Miss Challoner was as charming as before, Jack had found her out and got her to dance with him, and as I watched her whirling round in the waltz with him I felt as if she must already be lost to me, and my evening, from being a blissful dream, became a nightmare, and I took the first opportunity to slip away home.

Next morning at breakfast, or, rather, the *dejeuner à la fourchette*, for we did not come down till eleven o'clock, Jack was full of the charms of that pretty Miss Challoner, and

caused me agonies of indignation and jealousy by announcing that she was "such a devilish pretty girl and such good company that he felt inclined to go in for her in earnest."

This elegant fashion of expressing his admiration for my divinity was more than I could bear, so I said rather shortly, "Hadn't you better wait till you see if she is inclined to go in for you? She may not admire you quite so much as you imagine."

"Not admire me?" said he, placidly. "Oh, that will be all right. A girl does not show how much she likes a fellow till he makes up to her a bit, and almost any girl will think twice before she says 'No' to a good-looking fellow who does her the honour of asking her to marry him, unless, indeed, she happens to be an heiress, and then they often give themselves airs, no doubt, but Miss Challoner has not got much, if she has anything. She has a brother in India, I was told, for I was asking about her last night, so no doubt she may think an offer from a man who has good connections and good prospects worth thinking about. Besides," he added, with an air of confidence, "I mean to make her madly in love with me, and I have not usually been unsuccessful when I applied my mind to the subject. By Jove! she is really most uncommonly fascinating, and in quite a fresh style. What charming pictures I could paint of her!"

"Well!" I retorted to this speech, "if confidence in yourself is any proof of merit you should succeed, but I much question if you will find Miss Challoner quite so easy to win as you imagine."

Jack stopped eating to regard me with a curious air for a moment, and then said, "What's the matter, old boy? You are quite grumpy this morning, seem only to want to sit upon me and damp my young enthusiasm instead of encouraging me as you should. By the way, you disappeared quite early last night, and now you look as dismal as an undertaker. Did the supper disagree with you, or what?"

I muttered something about cold suppers and parties being things I did not like, and then tried to turn the conversation—not a difficult thing to do, since Jack seldom thought very long on one subject, and presently we went out to continue our explorations of the town. Not for worlds would I have Jack guess the real reason I felt so disagreeable, and as Miss Challoner's name was not mentioned again during our walk we came home quite harmonious.

CHAPTER V.

Madame de Marteville had been a very good friend of ours in Paris, and as we were anxious to renew our acquaintance with her, we went to make our call that afternoon, about five o'clock, when she was likely to be at home, and, as we expected, we found her in the drawing-room.

After a little general conversation, Jack went out on to the terrace with one of Madame de Marteville's daughters to enjoy the view of the sea, and the picturesque old city, which was very fine, and being left to entertain Madame, I took the opportunity of asking her about Miss Challoner—a thing I did not wish to do in Jack's hearing.

To my remark that Miss Challoner seemed clever, as well as pretty, Madame replied, with a little shrug of her plump shoulders and a slight sigh, "But yes; *cette chère Aimée* is clever, in a way; but what a way, so 'inconvenable,' so what you English call 'eccentric.' She has so many ideas not suitable to the '*jeune fille*,' not in place with a girl. It is truly a grief, a desolation, to her aunt, and yet she is amiable, good, a sweet girl, except that she will do such odd things—will read such wild books."

"Indeed!" I said. "I saw nothing peculiar about her last night, except that she spoke more sensibly than most young ladies; I found her conversation most interesting."

"Ah! well! Monsieur Harden, that may be; *Aimée* talks cleverly, amusingly, I grant you; and you saw her for the first time. She would not speak to you of those strange ideas of hers till she knew you better; she does not, of course, tell all the world of them."

"May I ask what those ideas are, Madame?"

"What they are?" replied Madame. "I cannot truly tell you what they are, such things weary me too much, so I never talk about them to her; but I believe she has been reading works by Allan Kardec, and some of those that are called Spiritualists in your England and in America; there are many books she has, I believe, but I cannot remember the names of them, they do not interest me. I disapprove of all such wild speculations, such attempts to know what is not well for us to learn. They are against the teachings of the Church; and my spiritual director, Father Ambrose, forbids to us such discussions. As for *Aimée Challoner*,

poor child, she doubtless will give up such things when she marries, and, like others, becomes absorbed in her husband and her children, her position in society."

"When she marries?" I asked, anxiously. "Is she then engaged?"

"Alas! no, she is not—it is quite sad; with her appearance she ought to be, but she is so difficult to please. She is already twenty-two, and it's quite time she was settled; she will get quite *passée* by-and-bye. It is no fault of her aunt, dear Madame Bonnell, that it is so; she and I have done our best for her. We took such pains to arrange several good marriages for her, but she has no ambition, no desire to be well settled; she would not even hear what we would say to her, she would not see the gentlemen we proposed for her. She declared that they did not please her, they had no ideas, and that she would as soon be put up to auction like the Circassian women as disposed of in that way. She has no 'dot' to speak of, and yet she gives to herself airs as if she could choose whom she pleased; those were such estimable young men, and would not have noticed the want of money. Such ungrateful conduct on her part, after all the trouble we took, and so disrespectful to her aunt; but what can you expect from a girl brought up as her father brought her up? He allowed her to read such books as your Darwin and Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and others whose names are unknown to me, quite unfit to give a girl sensible ideas and make her dutiful. Truly, in England, your young ladies do strange things, and Aimée seems to have done as she pleased with her father. He was an Englishman, Major Challoner, and married my dear Elise; she died a few years after her marriage, and I lost sight of her children till they grew up. George, the son, went into the army, and is now in India; Aimée travelled about with her father till he died suddenly, four years ago, and since then her aunt, Madame Bonnell, who lives in Paris, has taken charge of her."

To my inquiry if Miss Challoner's mother was French, Madame de Marteville told me that she was half French and half Irish, and that they had been educated at the same convent, and had all been the greatest friends, and it was in order to be near her (Madame de Marteville) that Madame Bonnell and her niece had come to Genoa for a visit, and that they would be there some time. They were staying at a

villa close by, and Aimée was often round with her daughters. "They are friends, as my daughters and the daughter of my dear Elise should be, but they are not 'confidantes.' Hortense and Gabrielle cannot understand Aimée, she has not the interests that they have, and I do not permit that she speaks any of her strange thoughts to them; but she is amiable, and doubtless they will do her much good and help her to see what a well-brought-up young girl should be. Her Aunt Louise hopes with me that in time Aimée's good sense will make her try to be like other girls."

"But," I said, "probably what seem to you such strange ideas are much discussed in literary circles just now, and Miss Challoner only repeats what she has heard others say; there is a great deal of discussion just now on these occult subjects."

"Doubtless, Monsieur," said Madame, with much dignity of manner, "but they are not for young ladies to discuss; their thoughts are best regulated for them by the Church, and it is most dangerous for a girl to say that she does not believe in those things which the Church teaches. Aimée will not even attend your English Church, and though I cannot regard it as anything but full of heretical errors, yet it is at least safer for a girl to have a belief in some form of religion than to say that she believes in none of those established religions. Men may be pardoned if they lack faith, for *le bon Dieu* does not expect of them such goodness as from women, and with a young girl such a want of faith, such defiance of all authority of the Church, can only bring terrible consequences. Father Ambrose has talked to her in vain, and, good man, he says to me, that he much fears unless she awakens from her errors her soul will be amongst those lost for ever; we can only pray that she may be awakened soon."

What Madame de Marteville said of Miss Challoner greatly increased my interest in her, for I need hardly say I did not share that lady's opinions as to the position and duties of women, and I was planning how to see her again next day, when chance brought us together for the third time.

CHAPTER VI.

The morning after my visit to Madame de Marteville I got up rather early, with the intention of making a sketch of the city and harbour of Genoa from the terrace wall of a deserted villa just above and a little to the left of the one occupied by Madame de Marteville. In looking at the view from her house I had noticed this ruinous yet picturesque old villa, and had remarked that the view from it would be even better, while the broken terrace wall and ancient garden would make a fine foreground far superior to the trim precision of Madame de Marteville's well-kept garden. I therefore resolved to find my way to the old house and make my sketch. Contrary to my usual custom, I did not ask Jack to go with me, for, strange to say, his company had grown almost distasteful to my during the last few days. I was vexed and angry with myself that it should be so, and I fought hard to get rid of the feeling, or at least to disguise it even to myself. It seemed monstrous that we who had been such friends could suddenly cool under the influence of such a feeling as jealousy. Our friendship must be worth little if it could be so easily disturbed, yet in spite of myself I felt it was a relief to wander away and think my own thoughts alone.

I made my way through the town to where a narrow, steep lane, ending in a flight of steps, led up to the old villa. It was about seven o'clock, and a delightful morning, so clear, so fresh. The blue waters of the Mediterranean lay sparkling in the sun. The harbour was full of ships of all sizes and nations. At my right lay the famous Cornice Road, which leads to Nice and the Riviera, while below the old town, with its steep, narrow streets and picturesque old houses, was slowly waking to the bustle of daily life. At the top of the steps a sharp turn brought me out on to the terrace of the deserted villa, and as I turned the corner I started and gave an exclamation of surprise, for seated on the ruined wall of the old garden was Miss Challoner herself. She had a book in her hand, and seemed to be dividing her attention between it and the lovely view before her.

At the sound of my voice she turned her head, and colouring slightly, wished me "Good morning" in a tone of astonishment. I returned her salutation, and then explained why I had come, and that I had no idea that anyone but

myself would be out so early. Miss Challoner laughed, and said she too was an early bird, and usually came there and spent a couple of hours before breakfast, reading and watching the boats in the bay.

"We are living in that house you see to the right there," she said, pointing it out to me; "and I have only to go out of the garden gate and up those steps, and I am here, with all Genoa at my feet. My aunt at first did not like me going out alone, but I explained to her that I had always been in the habit of going about unattended, and she reluctantly consented to my doing so if I kept within sight of the house and garden. This is so quiet a spot, too, that you are the first person I have seen since I began to come here."

"Then I must apologise for intruding on your solitude, Miss Challoner, but I noticed this place yesterday while calling on Madame de Marteville, and thought that from it I could make a good sketch."

Aimée insisted that I must not give up my intention of sketching or she would go away, so I got out my paints, etc., and set to work, glad of an excuse to stay near her. After a few remarks on general subjects I turned the conversation to Madame de Marteville, and asked Miss Challoner how she liked French life. She laughed, and said she liked it very well, only she was afraid she was not quite what her aunt and Madame de Marteville approved of. "Did she say anything about me to you?" she asked. "Did she confide to you Father Ambrose's opinion that I am one of those who—at present at all events—have not the hope of even a purgatory before me? She is so much exercised about me that she tells everyone about it sooner or later."

"Well," I replied cautiously, "she did seem to think it remarkable that you should be so difficult to convert to the views of the reverend father."

"Poor Madame de Marteville! She and my Aunt Louise are excellent, kind-hearted women, but they are so completely under the influence of the Church that they dare not think for themselves; their minds have never travelled out of the narrow little groove in which they were educated, and the idea of anyone daring to question the teachings of the Church, or to reason for themselves, fills them with terror at the reckless boldness of such an idea. I do not say this because they are Roman Catholics. I have known Protestants whose

minds were just as cramped and chained down by their doctrines, and whose feelings in regard to what they call 'my ideas' (though they are not mine, since I only borrow them from many great writers) would be much the same as those of my aunt and Madame de Marteville. When I tell you that my dear father was an admirer of Thomas Paine, Stuart Mill, Charles Bradlaugh, and others of like opinions, and that he was a Radical and almost a Socialist, you will understand that I could hardly be satisfied to take in unquestioning faith the teachings of a narrow-minded priest such as Father Ambrose. I have met those both in the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches who have been men of liberal views as far as their creeds would allow them—men of considerable learning—and though I could not agree with them, yet I have respected their sincerity. But this priest whom Madame and my aunt would offer me as a guide on that unknown path we all must travel is a man of limited knowledge and bigoted views, whose only idea is to terrify poor ignorant souls into belief with pictures of the fiery torments that await all who differ from him. This is a common argument with all minds of a low type, whether they are sincere or not, and the further you go back in civilisation the stronger do you find this system of terrorising the ignorant into 'belief' in some dogma as the only means of saving themselves from the torments reserved for unbelievers."

"Ah," said I, "you must not suppose that all men who think seriously at all share in such views."

"Amongst men who mix much in the world there are perhaps comparatively few, and yet most men think it 'respectable' even for themselves to cling in a half-hearted way to the old ideas of the Church, while nearly all of them consider it beyond all doubt safer as well as most desirable for women to be religious, and as to thinking for themselves, that is always more or less dangerous. This is especially so abroad. In England and America women are growing more independent in thought and action every day, yet still amongst certain circles or sets it is thought 'unladylike' or 'unfeminine' for girls to enter into these questions."

"Ah, well," said I, looking up at her bright, animated face as she stopped speaking, "I hardly think anyone could call you unfeminine."

"Now you are descending to silly compliments, and I gave you credit for more sense," she replied, in an offended tone.

I protested that I did not mean it as a compliment, and was sorry if I had offended her.

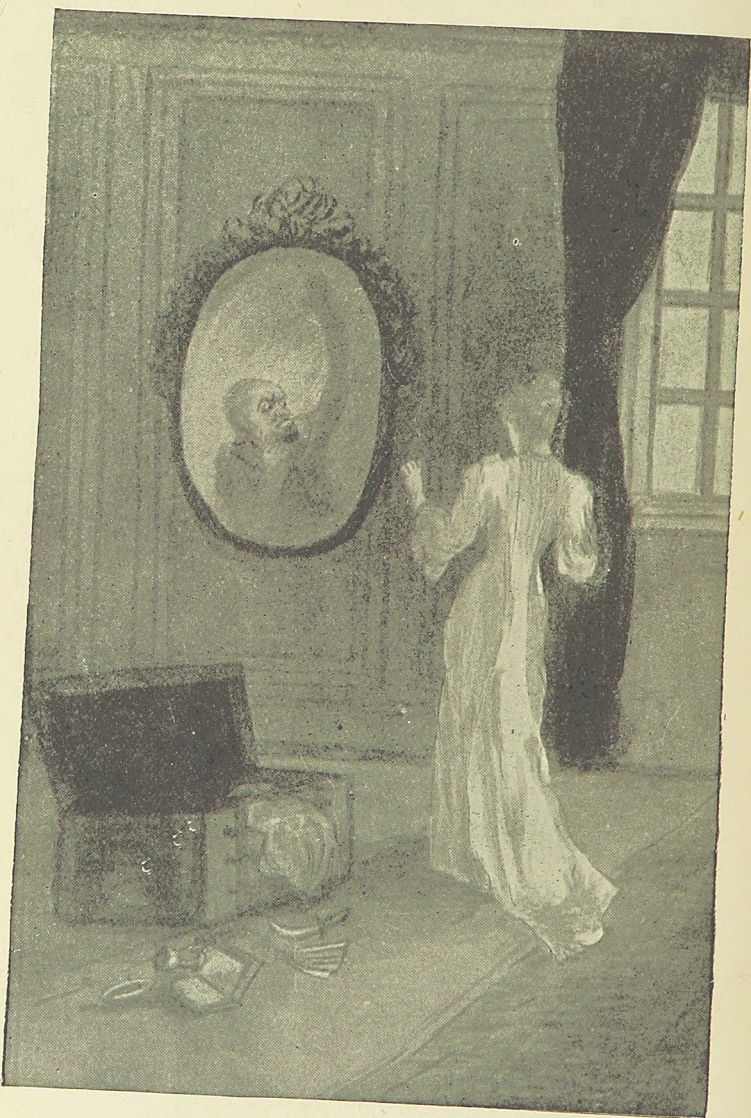
"Nay, then, I am not exactly offended," she answered, with a charming smile. "But if you know how tired I am of being 'shut up' as it were by some silly compliment, as though that were the only style of conversation we women could understand, you would not do it."

"But I did not intend to do so. On the contrary, I am much interested in what you say and in those speculations myself, and have read and thought much on such subjects, but it is unusual to meet a young lady who will discuss them."

"I have not arrived at any definite ideas on these mysterious subjects," I said, continuing our conversation. "I am only groping for the truth, and, like yourself, cannot accept the dogmas of any of the Churches as a satisfactory solution of my difficulties; nor, on the other hand, can I credit the materialist's theory of annihilation at death. I cannot feel that this brief life can be our all of eternity. Surely the minds of great thinkers of all ages must have some greater object in their development than merely to leave a record of their thoughts for other men, and then to be extinguished themselves by the eternal darkness of such a death as strict materialists believe in?"

"Yes! but do you think anyone quite believes in total extinction at death? A very few may, yet most men cling to the hope that they shall live again somewhere. Is not this instinctive clinging to the principle of life in some form a proof that there is some inner consciousness within us that cannot die, that our lives must be continued again after this present stage of existence is past? Speaking of books, have you ever read any of the Spiritualists' writings on these subjects? I got by chance a copy of Allan Kardec's 'Livres des Esprits' about a year ago, and it so interested me that I bought some books written by English and American Spiritualists on the same subject, and should have read others, but my aunt was so horrified when she found them one day that I cannot, without almost defying her, get any more, and she has been so kind to me that I feel it would be most un-





grateful to oppose her very strongly in this matter; and as she insists on seeing all I read, I have let the subject drop for the moment, but I am too deeply interested in these phenomena, and all that they open to my view, to leave the matter alone for long—I only wait a better opportunity than I have at present to investigate them.”

“Yes, of Allan Kardec I have heard—who has not?—but I never read his book, and should like you to lend it to me. I once read a copy of Sinnett's ‘Occult World,’ but, wonderful as much in it appeared, I had too little time to pursue the subject, and I cannot say that Theosophy as there explained seemed suited to our Western ideas; it is too much like going back to the times of the wizards and genii of Eastern fable. As for the class called Spiritualists, the little I have read of them only gave me the impression that they must be a set of eccentric people, who sat round tables and imagined they were moved by the spirits of their departed friends; and for my part, I should object to return for any such frivolous purpose as to play tambourines, tilt tables, and generally alarm my friends.”

“Yes, if that was all the returning spirits could do, you would be right to object; but if I tell you that the table is merely used as a sort of telegraph which, by means of raps and tilts, spells out words, and that spirits not only play tambourines, as you say, but show themselves and speak to us, telling us where they are, what they are doing, and by what means they come back to us, would you say the purpose was frivolous? And yet in those books that I read the spirits are described as doing all this, and more. Ah! when I think of my dear father, and that it might be possible to lift the veil which hides him from me now, I feel as though I must find some means of breaking from the narrow life to which I am tied and going boldly forward to find the road that might lead me to him. But I know not how to begin—a girl cannot do anything by herself, and most paths are closed to her, except the old beaten tracks. Hedged in by ‘the proprieties,’ I can do nothing at present.” She paused for a moment, and then added: “In speaking of Sinnett's book, does he offer any theory on the subject of Indian magic? My father used to tell me wonderful stories of the almost impossible things done by the Hindoo fakirs.”

“To explain all these remarkable things we would have

to enter into the vexed questions of mesmerism, hypnotism, and influences of good and bad spirits, human and otherwise. Lord Lytton, in his 'Strange Story' and 'Zanoni,' treats these subjects from the psychological point of view to some extent, and I understand had studied deeply all the different theories on these occult things; but my own knowledge is too limited to explain what his conclusions were, and, like yourself, I am only on the threshold of the great field such studies open to our view, and, like you, I should gladly learn more."

"Then, Mr. Harden, I will lend you the books I have got, and you must give me your ideas when you have read them; to me they seem to offer an explanation of many curious things—ghosts and haunted houses amongst the number."

"By the way, Miss Challoner, speaking of haunted houses, I once spent a night in one, and was uncommonly glad to get out of it; indeed, I am somewhat ashamed of the mode in which we fled from it."

"A haunted house! Oh, do please tell me all about it, I did so want to hear a real ghost story from someone who has seen the ghost—do tell me what you saw."

Thus urged, I told her the story with which my readers are already acquainted, of the night Jack and I spent at Ben's Hollow, and also the strange story Tim Kelly told us.

Miss Challoner listened to all that I had to say with a curious expression of wonder growing in her face, but she made no remark till I finished, and then said, abruptly—

"Pray what was the name of the house? Where was it situated?"

I told her the house was called "Ben's Hollow," and that it was near the town of M——, in the West of Ireland.

"Well, that is strange," said she. "What will you say when I tell you that I am the granddaughter of Captain McMurrough, and that I have heard the story from himself, much as you have told it, and he himself could never find any satisfactory explanation of what he had seen. He died when I was fifteen, so I can well remember what he told us, though, as a rule, he objected to speak about it."

"The estate of Ben's Hollow is not a large one, but the income—such as it is—is very acceptable to my brother George, who succeeded to it as the only grandson. He came of age three years ago, and as he was in India at the time, we have never been to Ireland to see the place, though I

have often felt curious about it. And now I must tell you of a strange and startling experience that happened to myself in Paris three years ago, just after George succeeded to the estate of Ben's Hollow—an incident which I now think was connected with the hauntings there.

"You must know," said Aimée, continuing her narrative, "that my father died four years ago this summer, and at his death I went to live with my aunt Louise in Paris. I had been with her nearly a year when George came of age and came into possession of Ben's Hollow and all our grandfather's personal property. He had given each of his daughters their share at their marriages, and the Irish property, and a couple of old oak chests, which were filled with heirlooms from Ben's Hollow, were left to George, my only brother. George being in India, these great oak chests were sent from the banker's in Havre, where they had lain for years, to Paris, to my aunt's house, in order to be examined, as George had written asking us to look through them and let him know what they contained. My aunt was not very well at the time, so she set me to examine them and make an inventory of what was there.

"The boxes were left in a small ante-room, and I was busily engaged in looking through the things when a curious event happened. I had found all sorts of queer things—old silver, old lace, an old fan (so curious that I resolved to ask George to let me keep it), old dresses, coats, spoons, powder flasks, pistols, belts, etc., many of them centuries old. I was sitting with them spread round me on the floor, in little heaps, while I had a pencil and paper and was writing a list. There was a small oval mirror between the windows, and just two feet or so in front of where I sat. As I raised my head and was about to take up a queer old knife with a carved handle, I suddenly saw a face reflected in the glass before me—a man's face, as if he were standing behind me. I started, and looked over my shoulder; but there was no one, and yet when I looked back there was the face still scowling at me from the glass. It was a dark, evil-looking face, and the head and shoulders were very distinct and life-like. With a dress of Cromwell's time, and a cropped head, he was exactly a picture of one of his troopers. My first impulse was to scream and run away, and then I felt that would be foolish—it must be a fancy—there could be nothing there, I argued—so I looked again at the glass. There was the face still, and now its expression

changed—it smiled at me—such a horrid smile!—and then I saw the hands put up near the face, with the palms open and the fingers spread out towards me, as though he was throwing something at me. I have since seen pictures of mesmerists using their hands with the same gesture, but then I knew nothing of mesmerism, and had hardly heard of it. He fixed his eye too on mine with the staring look you see in a cat watching a bird. For half a second I was almost paralysed, then I jumped to my feet, ran from the room, and as I opened the door I declare I heard a horrid wild laugh. You may smile at me, but it was all so real, so vivid, that nothing will ever make me believe it was all my imagination, as people will say. Well, after that I heard strange noises at night, and twice or thrice thought I saw a dark shadow following me about in the evenings. I got quite nervous and did not like to meddle with the old things in the box again, so I got Marie, my aunt's maid, to bring me the curious old fan that I fancied, and to put the rest of the things back in the large chests, and then they were sent off to the bank again, and I have never seen or heard any strange noises since.

“About eight months ago I came across a copy of Owen's book, and I have read, as I told you, some others; but at that time I knew nothing about the return of spirits, and had read only the usual run of ghost stories that explain nothing, and I have never before imagined I saw anything supernatural.”

“I confess, Miss Challoner, it is a curious coincidence that this face you describe should be so like what I thought I saw at Ben's Hollow. I should much like to read the books if you will lend them to me. I have a great ‘hankering’ after the mysterious myself, and have a great desire to find an explanation of these things which we have both seen.”

Miss Challoner promised to give me the books if I would call that afternoon on her aunt, and after a few more remarks we parted, as it was now nearly nine o'clock.

CHAPTER VII.

I returned to the hotel in great spirits. I had enjoyed nearly two hours of uninterrupted conversation with my charmer, and had the prospect of more opportunities of a like nature, and was to see her again that very afternoon.

Jack and I spent the forenoon sketching near the harbour, and were on the best of terms once more, as neither of us alluded to Miss Challoner. About three o'clock Jack went out, to call, he said, on Madame de Marteville again, and I took the opportunity to make my way to Madame Bonnell's villa.

I found Aimée and her aunt both in the salon, and Aimée presented me, saying, "This, aunt, is the gentleman who, I told you, has been in Ireland and seen the old house at Ben's Hollow. Is not that odd?"

Madame Bonnell was a decidedly handsome lady of about fifty-five or sixty, with a wonderfully fresh complexion, very dark eyes and eyebrows, and almost white hair, which gave her a rather peculiar appearance. She was rather tall, and her figure was still slight and elegant. Her expression was very kindly and gentle, but I should not say she looked particularly clever or strong-willed, and I could well fancy her religion as being more one of blind faith than of what, for want of a better expression, I must call "intellectual conviction." She was the eldest of Captain McMurrough's daughters, and was the child who was with them there, and though too young to remember living at Ben's Hollow, yet she had heard the story from her parents so often that she was much interested in hearing that I had seen the house, and made me describe my visit to it, with all the particulars. She herself was by no means incredulous on the subject of ghosts, holding that such things were permitted to be as a warning to us against evil lives. Père Ambrose, she said, considered that the return of spirits from the other world was quite in accordance with the teachings of the Church, but it was only those appointed by the Church who should venture to deal with such spirits in any way; as to the laity any attempt to address or come in contact with them was not only sinful and dangerous, but often fatal, to both soul and body. She could only feel thankful that her parents had escaped from that Irish house without worse things than had occurred to them, and she could never

think without terror of anyone she knew tampering with these forbidden mysteries.

As I did not wish to offend Madame Bonnell, I merely said I had not yet made up my mind on such subjects, and then turned the conversation to other things, and exerted myself to the utmost to interest her and win her good opinion.

I was enjoying myself watching the varying shades of expression which our conversation called forth on Miss Challoner's charming face, when the door of the salon opened and the servant announced "Madame de Marteville and Monsieur Mastairs," and to my chagrin Jack, whom I thought I had got rid of for the afternoon, made his appearance escorting Madame de Marteville.

Jack bowed, on being presented to Madame Bonnell, with an easy charming grace of manner I would have given worlds to possess, and looked at Miss Challoner as if he were overpowered with happiness at again beholding her, while he said something in a soft low voice that made her laugh and blush. As I watched them, all my old affection for my friend, once almost my idol, died out of my heart, and a bitter feeling of hatred filled my soul—a feeling so strong, so intense, that for a moment I felt as a murderer might when he meditates killing his enemy. But like a wave the feeling passed and my better nature asserted itself, and with a shudder I shook off the evil thought. As I did so I seemed to feel and see a dark, mist-like form pass from behind me to my friend Jack for a moment, then it passed away, and I became conscious that Madame Bonnell was making a commonplace remark to me. With an effort I answered her, and the conversation became general till the arrival of five o'clock tea and some more visitors, soon after which we felt obliged to take our leave.

As Jack and I walked home I made a great effort to talk to him in our old friendly fashion, and, as he was totally unconscious of having annoyed me, he did not remark the constraint of my manner.

Looking back now, when time and circumstances have made many things clear to me that were mysterious then, I can judge of my friend's character and actions without either the blind admiration I once felt or the bitter feelings that followed it. I can see that what seemed to me then indifference to my feelings, was simply an inability to think of any-

one but himself and his own desires. I had always been so content to take a "back seat," as the Americans say, and to give way to the claims of my superior friend in all things, that he naturally never thought of my feelings at all, or that I would hesitate to retire and leave the field for him, when I found that he, too, admired Miss Challoner. He had been so flattered and spoilt all his life at home, and by the world in general, that he had the utmost confidence in himself and his powers to please, and never thought of me seriously as a rival. I felt hurt to find how little he thought of me when our interests clashed. He knew, I thought, that no woman had ever wakened in my heart the interest Miss Challoner had done, and, though I was too proud to say it to him, I had hoped he would have spared me this one woman, whom of all the world I longed to win. His love affairs had been pretty numerous if not very lasting or deep. He was always in love with some fair one or other, and would rave to us all at the studio of the charms of the last one who had won his fancy, till a fresh one would appear, and in a marvellously short time the others would be forgotten. That his present fancy for Miss Challoner could be of this fleeting nature did not occur to me, or that he could be less in love with her than myself. I felt as if I had found so great a treasure that all men must be eager to take her from me. To stay then and watch my friend's success would be torture to me, and reason suggested the wisdom of going away; yet a power stronger than my reason held me to the spot and made it impossible for me to leave.

As we went home Jack told me that, with the aid of Madame de Marteville, whom he had enlisted on his side, he had persuaded Madame Bonnell to allow her niece to sit to him as the model of Beatrice in his picture of "Benedick and Beatrice," which he was painting for the Grosvenor Gallery Exhibition of next year. If it was a successful likeness he had offered to give Madame Bonnell a copy in return for Aimée's trouble in sitting for him.

He was in great spirits, and felt very confident that before the portrait was finished he would have made such good use of his time that he would be able to ask for Aimée herself without much danger of a refusal. "I say, old fellow," he added, "I shall want your help now. It will look better to the old ladies if we both go up while the picture is painting.

I don't want them to see what I am after too soon, not till I can make a little running first, in case Madame Bonnell should take it into her head to object, so if you go you can talk to Miss Challoner and the old lady while I paint. You can, in fact, act as 'gooseberry,' don't you know, and then, some day when you come across some nice quiet girl (a sensible one and a bit of a 'blue-stocking' would suit you, I should say), why then I will be happy to do a similar turn for you, and draw off any old ladies there may be in your way."

Had Jack been less absorbed in his own plans he must have observed the effect of this speech on me, but he was too full of himself to notice my silence and my manner, and continued to talk in his confident, boastful way (that had once seemed so frank and amusing to me) till we reached the hotel, when I framed an excuse about writing letters and made my escape to the solitude of my own room for a time.

The next two weeks that followed, during which the portrait made satisfactory progress, was a time of mixed pleasure and pain to me. To stand by and watch Jack making love to Aimée was a terrible penance, but it was balanced by the delightful sense of familiarity and friendship that grew up between us during these visits; and then Aimée and I had often opportunities, growing out of our acquaintance, of long conversations about the books she lent me and the new ideas they suggested, besides topics of more ordinary interest which we all discussed. My sketch of the town and harbour of Genoa from the ruined villa gave me an excuse for going there in the early mornings, and though Miss Challoner hesitated at first about going there as usual, yet on my pointing out that in that case I should feel myself like an intruder on her solitude and should stop away also, she laughingly agreed to come as before, and further to bring me those books which we could not speak about before her aunt and my friend, and in this way we drifted into that kind of delightful intimacy which the possession of a mutual secret—however innocent in its nature—so often produces. If my conscience whispered sometimes that I was not acting to my friend in exactly a straightforward way, by not letting him know that I, too, loved and intended to win Miss Challoner, I silenced it with the reflection that after all he could see for himself if he chose, and the field was open to us both. In love as in war all things are fair, and, indeed, in my then frame of mind,

I fear I should not have cared whether my conduct was fair to my friend or not. My pleasure in Aimée's society, and my desire to call her my own, were so great I could not think of anything else.

To do Aimée justice, she could hardly be accused of flirting with either of us in the strict sense of the word. She was so perfectly frank and natural in her manner to us both that we might almost have been her brothers. She liked to talk to me of things she was not allowed to talk of to anyone else, and she was amused by Jack's cleverness and unconscious egotism, his easy good-nature and perfect confidence in himself. He showed that he felt all avenues to fame and fortune lay open before him, and it was only a question of which he would choose as the road to reach it. It is wonderful how people are taken at their own valuation in this world, and Jack's belief in himself made most people (on a first acquaintance, at all events) regard him as a remarkable and rising young man who only lacked an opportunity to distinguish himself. He had really artistic feeling and cleverness, and he had besides a great ability of impressing people with the fact.

What bright visions rise in my memory as I recall those happy weeks we spent in Genoa. I see once more the bright sunshine, the sparkling blue sea, the quaint old houses, the handsome palaces, the pretty villas, the narrow streets, and remember the scent of the flowers my love used to wear. I see again the cool "salon," with its windows looking to the north, where we used to sit for that wonderful portrait to be painted, Madame Bonnell with an interminable piece of fancy work in her hands, Jack in his most artistic-looking velvet coat, without which he said he could not paint, his fair hair worn rather long and curling round his handsome face, and an air of "genius" about his appearance generally that must have impressed the most sceptical as to his powers. And Aimée! My lovely Aimée, in her soft, white dress, with a lapfull of flowers and a blue ribbon in her brown hair, looking to my eyes as some of the angels from paradise might have looked in the days when they visited earth.

Ah me! Are there any dreams like the dreams of youth? Is there any love like that one deep passion which we can feel but once in our lives? Other loves there may be, but they are but as the shadows of the reality. The real love

comes to us but once. It may be as our first or as our last love, but there can never be another which can give to us the same exquisite pleasure, the same intense happiness or pain. Am I then wrong when I believe that the one true love of our souls must from its nature be eternal? That while the earthly loves that are but as the counterfeits of this spiritual love will in time pass away from us with the earth life of which they are a part, the true love will exist through all eternity, and will crown our lives in the higher life if its happiness be denied us in this?

CHAPTER VIII.

How long we might have remained in Genoa I know not had we been masters of our own time, but, unfortunately, we had to return to our work again, and our holidays drew to a close all too soon for us both.

A few days before we were to leave, an incident occurred which impressed me so much that I wrote it down at the time, and can, therefore, give it with more accuracy than if I spoke from memory alone.

We had been invited to a large party given by an Italian family of distinction in Genoa, friends of Madame de Marteville. There was among the guests a certain French Doctor, a man of science, and author of several important works, who had recently been engaged in studying the subject of hypnotism and hypnotic suggestion, as he preferred to call it. He had adopted the views of that school of thinkers who hold that the whole of the phenomena of Spiritualism and kindred subjects are nothing more than the transference of thoughts from the brain of the operator (or someone present with him) to the brain of the subject, and that they afford no proof whatever of the existence of any agency outside our own minds. He even denied that in hypnotism or mesmerism any fluid, such as ether, or anything whatever passed from the mesmerist to the person he mesmerised. He maintained that, in fact, anyone, by merely regarding a bright revolving metal disc, could hypnotise themselves, and thus place themselves in a

position to receive any suggestions from any minds with which they came in contact.

This gentleman, whom I will call Dr. L——, first attracted my attention from my overhearing a somewhat animated discussion he was engaged in with another gentleman in a corner of the room near where I was standing, and as the subject interested me, I drew closer to hear what he would say.

The gentleman with whom he was arguing was a retired English officer, of strong conservative views, and a rooted objection to what he termed "new-fangled nonsense," and he was contending there was nothing in the thing at all—hypnotism and mesmerism were both "bosh"—it was just a trick got up to delude people, like any other conjuring humbug. So animated did these two become that the attention of the rest of the company was drawn to them as well as mine; and one of the guests (I forget who) suggested that if Dr. L—— would give us a practical demonstration of his power it would be the most satisfactory argument of all, and that the best way would be for the officer, whose name was Captain Maldon, to pick out the person to be hypnotised from amongst those whom he knew to be free from all suspicion of being in collusion with Dr. L——, and for the other persons present to suggest to the Doctor what the "sensitive" should be asked to do. It was proposed that the tests to be given should be written on slips of paper by one of those present and handed to the Doctor by Captain Maldon. The Doctor would then read them over to himself and "suggest" mentally to his hypnotised subject what to do.

After some little debate this was agreed to, and a sister-in-law of Captain Maldon's was proposed, as being quite unknown to Dr. L——. This lady was a quiet-looking person of about forty-five or so, and was on her way back to England with her husband, a country squire, who had been spending his summer in Switzerland, and was now returning to his home. They had only arrived in Genoa a few days before on a visit to some friends, and were total strangers to Dr. L——. Captain Maldon and the squire both agreed that there would be no "hocus pocus" with this lady, and we all awaited the result of the experiment with much interest. Dr. L—— simply requested that we should all remain as quiet and passive as possible, and on no account get excited. He asked six people to write down on slips of paper what they wished her to do,

and then to fold them up and hand them to him. He then placed an arm-chair a little apart from the company and seated Mrs. Humphreys in it, and as he had not any of the revolving discs he spoke of with him, he proposed to make a few passes over her to induce sleep. Captain Maldon laughed and said, "Oh! yes, do anything you like; you may paw away as long as you please over her head—that won't help you much."

At first Mrs. Humphreys sat quite unaffected by the Doctor's magnetism, then her head sank forward, and she seemed to all appearance asleep. Dr. L—— motioned to Captain Maldon to hand him one of the slips of paper, which he read over mentally, keeping one hand lightly resting on the lady's head. She shivered and moved uneasily, and then rose and went over to the piano, like one walking in sleep, and took a flower from a vase and gave it to our hostess; then the Doctor willed her to do something else, and she went over to the table, took up a book, opened it at a certain page, and pointed to the third line. A nod from the Captain signified this was right; and then Dr. L—— took another slip of paper and without touching Mrs. Humphreys, "willed her" to execute this test. This time she returned to the end of the room where I sat, and after standing in an uncertain way for a moment, she walked up to where Aimée sat and took her fan from her hand and began to cross the room again. With a growing expression of wonder Captain Maldon nodded again to the Doctor, and was about to hand him another of the slips of paper, when Mrs. Humphreys stopped suddenly, and seemed to become greatly agitated; she held the fan (which I now noticed was a very curious-looking one, evidently a very old one, and made partly of old lace, and, indeed, as Aimée explained afterwards, it was the one she had found in the old oak chest that had come from Ben's Hollow, though this we did not think of till subsequently) tightly in her hands, and began to rub her forehead with it, and to moan and sigh as if much distressed. She shivered and moaned and made several convulsive movements, and then, as Dr. L—— (who had made us all a sign to keep quiet) touched her lightly with his hand, and asked her what was the matter, she began to speak in a strange, far-away, half-whispering voice. The first few words she uttered were unintelligible, and she talked like one in her sleep, moving the

fan from her forehead, and softly passing her hand up and down it as she spoke. Then in a low, dreamy, but distinct voice she said: "No! no! not this dark place. Take me away, I do not know this house, these people." She paused, and then spoke again, clearly and in a stronger voice: "I see a large house now, many people, they are dancing. What queer dresses, what hoops they wear, and powder on their hair; the men wear their hair long and tied with a ribbon, but oh! what faces, how sad, how weary they all look, and yet they seem to be obliged to go on moving about. I see the room, too, it is lighted by many candles; the windows are open and I see a garden and a dark sheet of water and hills—wild, dark hills beyond; there are trees round the house. It has a portico in front and a terrace with vases of flowers, and steps leading down to the water. Now I seem to be going down to the lake, and the house has faded behind me; it grows dark, the lake looks gloomy, such dark brown water—marsh water." Her voice died away, and she dropped the fan with a shudder and covered her eyes with her hands, then in a voice of terror almost, she exclaimed, "Who is that dark shadow? Why does he come here?" Then in a whisper she said, "He is following someone. He is following a young man, a tall, fair young man with curling hair; he goes with him everywhere, it seems to be all round him, this dark shadow." Again she paused, and then spoke once more. "Now I see two more people, and I see the lake again, and the fair young man stands by it; those other two come down the steps and along the path to him. It is a girl and a young man—a dark-haired young man. The girl has a dark blue dress on and a basket in her hand, a small basket, and she has something white like a shawl in the other hand; they are talking, and their heads are close together; they don't see the fair young man yet, but he sees them, and his face changes and he looks at them with such hate. Why don't they go back? I can't move to make them. They have reached the lake now, there is a boat on the shore, the fair young man stands by the boat and helps the girl into it; as she gets in she hands him the shawl and basket. Ah, the shawl has slipped and fallen into the water, the dark man has lifted it out and gets into the boat too. They are out on the lake now. The girl sits in the stern and steers the boat, the dark young man sits and rows and looks at her, the other—the fair one—is in

the bow, he looks angry and sits silent and sudden. There is another man in the boat, a dark shadow like a man; a short man with broad shoulders wrapped in a cloak; I can't see his face, he has something over it. He whispers in the ear of the fair man and points to a long knife he has; the fair man takes up the knife, and the dark shadow beside him seems to wrap himself all round the other till they look like one. I can hardly see the fair young man, he is lost in the darkness of the other. What! What is he going to do? Oh, what is it? Stop him, someone! He will kill the other; he has the knife in his hand and is trying to stab the other. The girl sees it and screams, and they are all struggling together, and that dark shadow seems to be over them all—they are all in darkness. Oh, stop it, someone, stop them. Will no one stop them; it is a murder I see—a murder." With a great cry of horror Mrs. Humphreys threw up her arms and then sank insensible on the floor.

In a moment the ladies were all round her, offering her smelling salts, fanning her, etc., and it was some minutes before Dr. L—— could restore order and get Mrs. Humphreys carried into a little anteroom where it was quiet. He then made a few passes over her in an upward direction, and after a few convulsive shivers she regained consciousness, but was so much shaken by the extraordinary experience she had passed through that she preferred to return home at once, and there, as far as the public were concerned, the matter rested. There were of course fifty explanations offered, the most popular being the thought-reading-hypnotic one—Dr. L—— being held by most to have proved that there was such a thing as thought transference, it being considered that Mrs. Humphreys' vision of the house, the lake, and the murder was merely a mixture of ideas existing in the minds of the other guests, her previous performances in carrying the book and the flower, as "suggested," being held to prove the Doctor's theory most satisfactorily.

Captain Maldon and his brother-in-law were by no means so readily satisfied, however, and the former more than hinted there must be some trickery practised by Dr. L——, though he confessed it was beyond his power to find it out, and he felt his sister-in-law had been made a victim of in some way. As to Mrs. Humphreys herself, she had no recollection of what she had seen, or done, or said. Her mind was a blank,

but she said that she felt quite nervous and upset, and should never allow such a thing to be tried again. In short, the party broke up rather uncomfortably, most people having a disagreeable idea that Dr. L—— was a pleasanter man to know at a distance, and that these sort of experiments were decidedly to be avoided as tending to upset one's established notions of things. For my own part I had been much interested, and was still more so when I learned from Aimée where she had obtained the fan. We had all recognised Ben's Hollow from the description, but that, Jack held, only proved that our minds were answerable for Mrs. Humphreys thinking of it. I however thought the incident curious enough to write down a full account in order to see if anything would follow that would be of interest.

CHAPTER IX.

The day following the striking mesmeric experiences of Mrs. Humphreys, I had just finished writing the account of what had occurred, and was in the act of putting it away in my paper case, when Jack burst into my room in a great state of excitement, exclaiming, "Congratulate me, old boy, congratulate me! I shall soon be the happiest man in existence."

"Congratulate you?" I faltered. "What do you mean? Have you been accepted by Miss Challoner?"

"Well, no! not exactly that, but I shall be. I have done all but propose to her. I have got Madame de Marteville to see what she would say if I did. You see, a fellow does not like to ask a girl to marry him till he is pretty well sure she will. It is not pleasant to figure as a rejected one, and as long as a man has not actually popped the question, it is always open to him to say he never intended to do so. Therefore I got Madame de Marteville to inquire from the fair Aimée what was her feeling on the subject. She seemed quite ready, really jumped at me I should say, and told Madame that I was to come and ask the question for myself if I wanted to know; so I am to go this afternoon, and Aimée will be by herself in the salon waiting for me. Madame

Bonnell will be as pleased as anyone, for she and Madame de Marteville think it quite time Aimée married. They began to despair almost, and I really don't think I could find a sweeter girl, or one to do me more credit. Wish me joy, old boy, and I'll make you best man if you like. Halloo! What's the matter? You look like a ghost! Are you ill?" he added, noticing at last my white face and trembling hands, which I tried in vain to steady as I gathered up my papers and prepared to leave the room.

"Well, yes! I am ill," I replied huskily. "It's the heat, I think, and besides I have had bad news that will oblige me to leave for London at once."

"Bad news?" said Jack, regarding me with a curious look. "Bad news? No one ill or anything of that sort, hey?"

"No, not exactly, but it is a great loss to me. I can't explain now, but I am anxious to get back as fast as possible."

"Well, you can't go till the six o'clock train leaves for Paris, and I daresay I shall be back in time to see you off. I'm sorry for you, old chap, but perhaps it's not as bad as you think now, and you'll get over it somehow."

I tried to get up a feeble smile and say I thought so too, and then somehow I got myself out of the room, and presently I heard Jack go out again.

I packed up my things hastily, and then spent the intervening time wandering about the town, scarcely knowing where I went or what I did, conscious only of a dull, numbed aching in my brain that made connected thought well-nigh impossible. It had come at last, what I had so long dreaded, what I had so often told myself must come, and I was no more prepared to resign myself to it than if I had not watched its development during those happy weeks. I felt I could not sink into the place assigned to me of a sort of brotherly spectator of my friend's happiness. To do so would drive me mad, and the best and only thing to be done was to go away as far and as soon as I could. In my heart I knew forgetfulness was impossible, but it was a relief to try to cheat myself into the belief that it only required me to make a determined effort to shake off the impression Aimée had made, and that once back at my work and in the old routine I could forget her.

I had to go back to the hotel for my luggage, and was glad to find Jack had not returned to see me off. I wanted

to escape meeting him again, and thought bitterly he and Aimée would have too much to say to each other to remember me.

During the long, weary journey back to London I was too restless to sleep, and the nights seemed endless as we rushed on through the dark country. In Paris I only stayed a few hours, and then went on again. It was a relief to find myself in motion, doing something, and yet, as mile after mile was added to the distance that separated me from the first and last love of my life, a strange feeling of depression came over me as if I was leaving all the brightness of my life behind me for ever. How dingy and dirty too looked our old rooms that had once seemed so snug and comfortable; how empty life seemed—how void of interest; since I had left those rooms scarce six weeks ago, what a change had come over my life! It was past ten o'clock when I arrived, and I was glad to throw myself on my bed and go to sleep, worn out at last with my long sleepless journey.

I spent the next day wandering about London, dined at a restaurant, and finally made my way back to my solitary rooms, and taking up a book tried to delude myself into the belief that I was reading, while ever and anon the face of Aimée would intrude itself upon my thoughts with such distinctness that I seemed almost to see her very self. Aimée—not bright and happy as I had seen her last, but with a sorrowful look of reproach in her eyes, as though my own sad thoughts had in some way changed her image in my mind.

I sat up thus smoking and thinking and trying to divert my thoughts by reading till nearly eleven o'clock, when there was a sound of a cab stopping at the front door, and then a man's voice in the passage, and who should walk in but Jack Masters—in no very good humour either, for he looked tired and cross and would hardly even shake hands with me. He looked at me in an odd sulky way, quite unlike his usual manner, and in reply to my astonished inquiry as to what had made him return so soon, he replied, with a bitter laugh, as he sank into an arm-chair, and gave a savage kick at an unoffending footstool, that it was the same reason that had brought me, he supposed. "Hang it, man, don't look at me in such surprise," he added; "I suppose I can have important private business as well as you?"

"Certainly, Jack, most certainly; but I thought you would

hardly have torn yourself away from Miss Challoner so soon."

"Confound Miss Challoner! She is just a sly flirt like the rest of them. Those quiet, sweet, innocent-looking girls, who go on as if they did not know how to flirt, are worse than any of the open kind, as I call them."

"Has she refused you?" I asked, with a sudden joy in my heart and, I fear, in my looks, for Jack scowled at me as he answered—

"Yes! she has, and I call it altogether disgraceful of her after the desperate way she went on encouraging me and almost making love to me herself—by Jove! but you needn't look as if there was anything to be glad about, d—— you! We are in the same boat after all; you were sweet enough on her yourself, or you wouldn't have been in such a precious hurry to leave Genoa when you thought I was the lucky man. She has played the same trick on us both, and made fools of us, that's all."

"Did SHE tell you this?"

"She didn't SAY it if you mean that, but when she talked to me about thinking my attentions all friendship and that sort of bosh (as if any man ever wastes his time dancing attendance on a girl from friendship), I asked if she had someone else in her mind, and she as good as admitted she had." Jack paused, and then added, "It's some Frenchman; I got that out of her." He gave me a queer look as he spoke, and as I glanced at him in return he turned uneasily away, as if he did not care for my eyes to meet his.

"Does her aunt know of this French admirer?" I asked.

"No! She keeps it to herself; she's sly, I tell you. But what's the use of asking me questions? Can't you drop the subject?"

His odd manner struck me very much, and he was so savagely cross about everything that he was very far from being pleasant company during the next few weeks.

I confess I was sorry for Jack, for, as he said, we were in the same boat, and ought to have sympathised with each other. But all my attempts to be kind to him were met by a sullen indifference, and he seemed greatly relieved when I let him alone at last. In reply to my suggestion that we might go for a few days' change in the country, as it was rather sooner than we were obliged to begin our work, we having returned so hurriedly, he replied that "he didn't see what good that would do, as he thought he had brought at least one devil

home with him from Genoa, and he did not want to go about picking up more of them." I was rather struck with this speech, for, truly, it was as if someone had taken possession of my friend, and, if the stories I had read about Spiritualism were true, such things might happen. I tried, however, to argue with and rouse him up to shake off the unpleasant influence, but he only got disagreeable and took to avoiding me as much as possible, and we drifted apart more and more every day. Our old friendship was a thing of the past, and when Jack said at last that he thought of moving farther west and taking rooms in a more fashionable quarter I assented, and said that in that case I should just keep on the old rooms myself as they suited me and I hated moving. And so it came to pass that we parted and each went our separate ways with scarcely the pretence of a regret.

What had caused our enthusiastic friendship to end thus abruptly? A woman, and a woman, too, who had herself passed out of our lives, who had only, apparently, crossed our lives to teach us the worth of our boasted friendship—I say apparently, for so it appeared to me at that time. In my ignorance I little thought how important a part we were each to act in the others' lives, nor how our fates were interwoven with the denizens of that old house in Ireland.

CHAPTER X.

Even now I can hardly look back without pain to the memory of the weary months of that long, dark, dreary winter. I tried in vain to forget Genoa, Aimée, and all that had made those short weeks so full of happiness, so full of vain hopes, of idle dreams. Do what I would, the remembrance haunted me with a ceaseless, weary pain, worse, far worse, to bear than any mere physical suffering. I could not forget her; I could not cease to cry in my despair, "Oh! that we had never met, or that I had been permitted to make her mine!" Her eyes, her smiles, haunted me, waking and sleeping; in crowds or in my solitary room she seemed ever beside me; so real was her presence I almost fancied at times I saw herself, and there was ever in her eyes a look of sadness, of reproach. I felt so haunted by the look that I began to fancy she must be in trouble, or, perhaps, ill, or in danger. So anxious and nervous did I become at last that I wrote to Paris to Madame de

Marteville, and in the course of my letter asked, as naturally as I could, where her friends Madame Bonnell and her niece were. I got no reply for some weeks, and then received a somewhat curt letter, saying she did not know where her friends were, they were travelling about. Her letter was very stiff, and intimated, as far as a polite letter could, that the writer did not wish any further acquaintance with me. Puzzled and hurt at its tone, I crumpled the letter up and threw it into the fire, resolved more than ever to shake off all that could remind me of my unfortunate romance.

I had been in the habit of giving lessons in painting, and had a small class of young men who met at my studio three times a week. About Christmas time I got a new pupil in the person of a young Irishman of about twenty, named Gerald O'Brien. His father lived in the West of Ireland, on a property that, according to their own account, had been in the family from the days of Noah, or before, at which time the O'Briens (like all the "rale ould families") had been kings in their own country. O'Brien was a capital young fellow, full of fun and high spirits, and, like most of his countrymen, equally ready to join in a frolic or a fight, whichever happened to be on hand at the moment. He took a fancy to me, as men younger than myself often do, and we soon became good friends, and, on more than one occasion, my greater experience and knowledge of life enabled me to help him out of scrapes he had got into, owing to the recklessness of his disposition.

I soon learnt all about him, for he was uncommonly fond of talking about himself and his family, which he felt to be the most important family in the world, since "everyone in Ireland knew, at once, who the O'Briens of Bally Brack were." He had an uncle, a barrister, who lived somewhere near Grosvenor Square, and a maiden aunt, named Miss Mary O'Brien, who lived in a flat at Kensington, and wrote books and articles for the newspapers. This lady seemed a really clever woman; her peculiarities consisted chiefly in her belief in Spiritualism, and what Gerald O'Brien called her fancy that she was a "medium," and could raise the "ghosts for herself, when she felt in want of society." She and her brothers—the squire and the barrister—had almost quarrelled over the subject, they holding that she was going out of her mind, and she declaring that they were too narrow-minded to study anything that seemed likely to interfere with their

conservative notions or disturb their prejudices. All this had made a sort of coolness for a time, but, seeing that Miss O'Brien's "delusions" were shared by some millions of people all over the world, it was scarcely possible to make them the ground for treating her as insane, especially as she was very clever on other subjects. As she did not try to disturb them in their beliefs, and as there was a sincere affection for her in their hearts, things gradually died down into a sort of truce, and the subject was simply avoided by both sides during her occasional visits to her brothers. Upon this aunt Gerald O'Brien had called soon after his arrival in London, and as he was rather a favourite with her he often spent an evening there, and invited me to go with him several times. Once I should have been most anxious to meet this lady, and to hear more of the subject that had so interested me; but now it was fraught with so many painful memories—it was so mixed with thoughts of that happy time that could never, it seemed to me, come again—that I shrank from it, and hardly encouraged Gerald to talk to me at all about his aunt and Spiritualism, and made excuses to escape from visiting her. Soon after, Miss O'Brien went to Paris on a visit, and thus I did not again get a chance of making her acquaintance.

Easter came, and with it a short holiday and an invitation to visit O'Brien's father and mother in Ireland. Gerald was going over, and was most anxious to take me with him, his parents sending me a most cordial invitation to visit them, and thanking me for the help I had given to their son. At first I wanted to refuse, but Gerald would take no refusal, and, after all, I thought it would be a change and do me good. So at last I consented, and we left London together.

Not till we were well on our journey did I think of enquiring in what part of the county W—— Bally Brack (the family seat of the O'Briens) was situated, and it was not till then that I learned it was near the county town of M——, and remembered that O'Brien was the name of one of the gentlemen mentioned by Tim Kelly in his story of the haunted house. I knew that Gerald came from the same county as that in which Ben's Hollow was situated, but I did not know he lived so near it; and, indeed, I had refrained from mentioning the house for the same reason that made Spiritualism and ghosts generally a painful subject to me. When, therefore, I learnt that Bally Brack was only about three miles from

Ben's Hollow, and was on the other side of the little lake, I could not escape the thought that there must be some strange influence that connected my destiny with that house, since fate was always bringing it across my path in some shape. Then, too, I had a half hope, which I tried in vain to smother, that through the O'Briens I might chance to learn something of the whereabouts of Miss Challoner, and my heart beat wildly at the thought of hearing her name once more.

We stayed one night in Dublin and took the morning train to the west, arriving at a small town, about eight miles from Bally Brack, late in the afternoon. There we found a car waiting for us, and had a pleasant drive to Bally Brack, which we reached just in time to dress for dinner. We were received at the hall door by Gerald's father and mother, and two very lively and rather pretty sisters, who hugged and kissed Gerald in a most demonstrative fashion, and shook hands most cordially with me. There was such a pleasant feeling of warmth and kindness about the whole family that my usual reserve with strangers melted at once, and I felt as if we should soon be like old friends. Wonderful, indeed, is the frank cordiality and warmth of manner of the Irish people; I know nothing like it for setting a lonely stranger at his ease and making him feel at home, and I shall always look back with pleasure and gratitude to my kind Irish friends and the many pleasant days we spent together.

As we had arrived rather late and it was almost dinner-time, I made my toilet hurriedly and started to descend to the drawing-room. I did not get there quite so quickly, however, as I intended, for I had just reached the end of the corridor, and was at the top of the stairs, when a door behind me opened, and, as I half turned round to see who it was, I uttered an exclamation of surprise and pleasure, for there, close to me, once more stood Miss Challoner herself—Aimée, my adored Aimée. She was changed; she looked pale and rather thin, and her eyes had a wistful, far-away expression. They had that same look of sadness and reproach that had so haunted me in my thoughts of her. In my joy at seeing her once more I forgot all else, and clasped the hand she held out to greet me with such passionate warmth that she started and blushed.

"Aimée—Miss Challoner!" I stammered. "Is this indeed you? I thought you were abroad."

"We have just come from Paris, and my aunt is re-

maining in London while I am staying here on a visit. I came last week with my dear friend, Miss O'Brien. Our families are old acquaintances, though I have not seen much of them for some years."

"Indeed, I did not know that. But you spoke of leaving your aunt in London. Are you, then, still living with her? You are not yet married?"

Aimée raised her eyes to mine with such a wondering, perplexed look that I felt sure the idea was a new one to her.

"Married!" she repeated, with a deep blush. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I was told last autumn that you were engaged to a Frenchman, and I thought you might be no longer Miss Challoner."

"Engaged to a Frenchman? Who, may I ask, told you that and why?"

"Do not ask that now. Another time I will tell you. First, tell me if it is true?" said I, still holding the hand she had given me to shake, and looking at her "with all my soul in my eyes," as the novels say.

Aimée coloured still more deeply, as she said in a low voice, "No, it is not true; it never was true, and I do not know why anyone should have said such a thing."

"Not true! Then you are still free—you are not engaged to anyone?"

"Really, Mr. Harden, you have no right to ask me such questions," began Aimée, and then she broke down, her voice died away almost in a sob, and she tried to draw her hand from my clasp.

My answer was to draw her closer to me and to take her other hand in mine, as I said in a low, eager voice, "Aimée, my beloved Aimée—may I not call you so? I dream of nothing but you; I can think of nothing but your sweet face, your dear voice. Give me then the right to call you mine. Be my wife, and I will work and win fame and fortune for us both. It is true I have not much to offer one like you, but give me hope that when I win a home worthy of you you will not refuse to share it with me. I am young and strong, and I am getting on, and ere long I hope to have a home to offer you."

"Foolish man," said she, looking up at me with a charming smile and blush; "I don't want fame and fortune, I only

want you, and I decline to be credited with mercenary sentiments."

"I will credit you with any sentiments you like if you do but say 'yes' to me now."

Her answer was almost inaudible, but it more than satisfied me, and I was about to claim the usual lover's privilege of a kiss when another door in the corridor opened, and the approach of Miss O'Brien caused me to drop Aimée's hand, and try to look as if we had just met on the stairs. Aimée, with a woman's ready presence of mind in such emergencies (which is far superior to clumsy man's), remarked that she had been surprised to meet an old friend so unexpectedly, and that we had been having a little talk on our way downstairs.

"Well, your talk has not helped you to get far on your way to the drawing-room," said Miss O'Brien, with an amused look at Aimée's flushed cheeks. "However, as I am late myself, I am much obliged to you both for keeping me company," and slipping her arm into Aimée's, she accompanied us to the drawing-room, where we found the rest of the party awaiting our arrival.

CHAPTER XI.

There were several people staying in the house, and four or five young officers had come over from the barracks to dinner. I got one of the young Miss OBriens to take down to dinner while Aimée fell to the lot of one of the officers, and we were separated by the whole length of the dinner table, so we did not get a chance of speaking to one another till we met in the drawing-room later on.

In the course of the evening I found myself seated near Miss O'Brien (the aunt), and took the opportunity of making myself agreeable to her. She told me that she had known Aimée's mother and aunt when they were young, but she had been so much occupied of late years that she had rather lost sight of them till they met by chance in Paris last winter. She had heard that Aimée had been making inquiries into Spiritualism and had much pleasure in helping her, and with

this mutual bond of sympathy between them the old friendship between the families had been renewed, and she and Aimée had persuaded Madame Bonnell to come over to London for a change during the London season. From Miss O'Brien Aimée had heard a great deal of Spiritualism, and together they had visited some of the best mediums, and Aimée had enjoyed the pleasure not only of HEARING from her father but she had also been enabled to SEE his face again in a materialised form. She had begun also to develop the gift of clairvoyance herself, and hoped ere long to get further proofs that those whom we have so long been accustomed to regard as lost to us for this life at all events are still able to return and visit and help us.

Miss O'Brien, however, said she would tell me more on these subjects another time, because she did not wish to discuss them in her brother's drawing-room. There was a tacit understanding between them that during her visits to her brother she would not speak of what was to him as his *bête noir*.

"Why," said she, "should I go out of my way to force my opinions on those who do not want to hear them? When Henry has some friend in the other life that he really wishes to see, he will be glad enough to seek for a road to reach them. As yet all his interests are in this world; he is not yet ready for Spiritualism, and we only worry and annoy one another by the useless discussion of the subject. He does not want to be convinced, and PROOFS in such cases are only thrown away. I am always ready to help those who want to know about Spiritualism, but I object to waste my time on people whose only idea in arguing with me is to convince me that I am a fool, and who really pay no attention to what I may have to say. Some other time, when we can be quiet and by ourselves, I will tell you more if you wish, Mr. Harden."

Accordingly we talked on other matters, and I found Miss O'Brien a most agreeable and clever woman. Presently, Aimée joined us for a short time, and the somewhat "conscious" manner of us both must have attracted Miss O'Brien's attention, for I saw her look at us once or twice with a highly-amused expression.

The next day was so much occupied by my friend Gerald and the plans he had made for our amusement, and by making

myself—as in duty bound—better acquainted with my host's family, that I had not a chance of more than a few minutes' private conversation with Aimée, and we agreed that until I had obtained her aunt's consent we must keep our engagement as private as possible. The only person to whom Aimée wished to confide our secret was Miss O'Brien, and she guessed it already, we felt.

The day after, however, fortune favoured us, and we contrived to stroll away from the rest of the party, who were engaged at lawn tennis, and to take refuge in the shrubbery, where we had a long talk all to ourselves at last.

After the usual lovers' talk, which I need not repeat, since it was more interesting to ourselves than it would be to anyone else, Aimée asked again why I had thought she was engaged to a Frenchman, and I told her what Jack had said on his return from Genoa.

"But how could he say that?" exclaimed Aimée. "I most certainly never said a word about any Frenchman. He asked me if I loved anyone else, and I told him he had no right to ask me that question. I tried to soften my refusal to his proposal as much as I could, but he seemed more angry than anything else, and said I had just made a 'cat's-paw' of him, or some such speech, and added that if it was you I was in love with I was wasting my time, for you had not much of an opinion of any woman, and always said a man must be a fool to get married. I confess I felt very angry with him and thought him rude, and I was glad to cut our interview short.

"I wondered why you did not come to see me, and it was not till Madame de Marteville called next day that I learned you had left Genoa without even bidding us good-bye. She was very indignant with me for refusing Mr. Masters, and with you too, for she said you had behaved most rudely, running away as you did. I should tell you first, however, that the day before she had spoken to me about what she called 'ce Monsieur, your English lover,' and said she had been asked by him to find out if there was any chance of my accepting him if he proposed. The poor young man, she said, was so diffident he did not like to ask me till he had some hopes of his proposal being listened to. She did not mention any name, and I thought she was speaking of you. I never imagined Mr. Masters could be diffident about anything or

bashful under any circumstances; and I told her to tell the gentleman that if he wanted an answer to his question he must ask me himself for it. I never dreamed she was speaking of Mr. Masters, and she never thought of you. It seems that your friend made a confidante of Madame from the first, and as you were generally together she never noticed you much or thought you might have intentions.

"Also, she was quite indignant that I had refused her protégé, and she had come to ask me what I meant by it. She had seen Mr. Masters again, and had told him that she could not understand it, and had repeated to him our conversation. Mr. Masters had laughed, and said, angrily, that perhaps the mistake came from not mentioning his name, and that possibly it was Mr. Harden who was the lucky man, in which case, he added, he should be sorry for me—for his friend Harden was not a marrying man at all, and that, indeed, as soon as he had told you about the matter and that I had refused him, and yet had admitted to Madame de Marteville that I cared for one of you, you had at once remarked that in that case the sooner you got out of Genoa the better, for amongst them the women seemed likely to make it unpleasantly warm for you—you were afraid you might be married against your will some fine day, and disposed of by a committee of match-making ladies.

"He also added that you had been so alarmed that you had actually taken the first train and gone away. To say that I felt insulted and indignant at such a speech is but a feeble way of expressing my feelings. It seemed such a cruel insult that you should have spoken and acted like that, and that Mr. Masters should have dared to repeat it to Madame de Marteville. I could hardly believe it; yet, when time went on and you never sent even a word of farewell, I could only think it must be true, and that I had been most foolish in treating you with the thoughtless frankness and confidence I had done, and I resolved to let it be a lesson to me for the future, since I could be so cruelly misunderstood. The fact that I did indeed love you only made my position harder to bear. It seemed so terribly humiliating to think that I should have allowed myself to love one who did not love me, and who had only been amusing himself at my expense. Worst of all, too, that your friend Mr. Masters should have known it, and have told Madame de Marteville. That you, too,

should have read my secret and despised me! I cannot tell you all I felt, all I thought, dear Richard—it is too humiliating to me, and but for your unfeigned joy when you saw me again I should never have spoken to you any more. Yet when I saw you I could not but read in your face and voice that there had been some strange mistake between us.”

Aimée's narrative astonished me greatly, and I hastened to explain in my turn why I had left Genoa so suddenly. That I had gone without waiting to hear the result of Jack's proposal, feeling, fool that I was, that he would be accepted.

What a fool I had been! and what a needless amount of suffering I had caused both her and myself! What a treacherous part, too, my old friend Jack had played towards each of us! I could hardly have believed it had anyone but Aimée told me. This, however, explained in part, at least, his altered manner to me and the sulky temper he had displayed of late. Yet what a change it was that had come over him; it was difficult to imagine he could be the same person I had known for years, and believed to be so kind and good-natured, if even he had been somewhat selfish at times. It seemed that since he could not win Aimée himself he was bent on making all the mischief he could between us. The discovery pained me greatly, though I did not feel it so much as I should once have done.

After the mutual explanations, already recorded, had been made and disposed of in the usual lover-like fashion, our conversation drifted round to the old house of Ben's Hollow, which I had last seen in company with Jack Masters, and Aimée told me that she was possessed with a strong desire to go and see it—she felt, in a sense, drawn to the place, and the desire to see it became stronger the nearer she got to it. At first I tried to persuade her not to go near the house, I had such a superstitious horror of the place. But she was so anxious to see it that at last I consented to go with her and Miss O'Brien, who also wanted to see it. We would go by daylight and not stay long, and I also made her promise not to go there without me. She said she did not wish to go with a party of noisy people from Bally Brack, who would be making jokes all the time, so we agreed to keep our visit to ourselves.

The next week was taken up with drives round the neighbourhood and visits from neighbours, dances, dinners, and the

usual festivities of a country life, and we did not get a chance of making our expedition to Ben's Hollow for some days. Towards the end of the week, however, there came a pause in the round of gaieties, caused by a very wet morning, which quite put an end to the proposed drive to an old castle planned for that day, and compelled us all to stay indoors and left us at liberty to split up into little coteries of our own. I naturally soon contrived to find myself beside Aimée and Miss O'Brien, and after a long delightful chat we decided that, as the rain seemed to be leaving off, it would be as well to take the chance and go over to Ben's Hollow. We could slip away quietly, and be back in time for dinner. Miss O'Brien had unfortunately a slight cold, and so could not go with us. But as I might have to return to London in another week we might not get so good a chance again, and Aimée was so anxious to go and see the place that I consented to take her alone. Miss O'Brien advised us not to remain longer in the house than we could help, and to return before it grew dusk. She, as a Spiritualist, attached considerable importance to the stories of the hauntings, and was of opinion that steps should be taken to find out the cause.

Soon after three o'clock we set out for Ben's Hollow, and had a rather muddy walk down to the lake where the O'Briens had a boat, in which we rowed across to the opposite side and to the lower end of the lake where Ben's Hollow was situated. We reached it about half-past four o'clock; the rain had cleared off, but the sky was still overcast with heavy clouds, and the wind was blowing cold and keen. The lake looked dark and sullen, and the thick trees which made a background to the house gave it a dull sombre look, even more depressing than when I had seen it before, and such a strange foreboding of coming evil seemed to my mind to hang over the whole place, that I proposed to Aimée to leave our explorations till a more cheerful day. She, however, laughed at my fears, and, drawing my arm within her own, remarked gaily that with me to protect her she had no fear of anything.

We made our way up to the house and opened the front door, Aimée having got the keys from the agent a few days before. The locks and bolts were so rusted that it took some time to open the door. We found ourselves in the large old-fashioned hall with the handsome oak staircase before us that

had been the scene of so many strange events; it looked just as it had done when I had last seen it, and I could not but think of my once friend, Jack Masters, and how we had made our escape from that same house, and I again proposed to Aimée to come away.

"Surely, Dick, you are not really afraid of the house at this hour of the day?" she said. "I thought it was only at night or in the dark that ghosts could be troublesome, and it is quite early yet. Let me at least look over a few of the rooms on this floor before we go." To this I reluctantly assented. Aimée herself was so dear to me that I could scarcely bear the idea of her running even an imaginary danger, and my own experiences in that house had not been reassuring.

As we entered the house Aimée slipped her arm through mine again, remarking, "Oh! by-the-bye, Richard, when I went to get the keys Moore told me that the day before a young gentleman—an Englishman he said—had asked if he might have the keys and go over the house, but Moore told him that my brother's last orders were that no one was to be allowed to look over the house, and that he was sorry he could not give them. The gentleman seemed to go away much disappointed, and said something about knowing the owners and writing to get leave. The curious thing about it is that the description of the gentleman was very like that of Mr. Masters. Surely he is not likely to be in Ireland just now?"

"Well, for that matter he may be anywhere, Aimée. The world is open to him as well as to me; but I confess I would rather not find him here just now, though if we met I should speak to him as though I knew nothing about his treacherous behaviour in Genoa. I don't want to come to an open quarrel with him, for he was once my dearest friend, and no doubt when he gets over his disappointment, he will be ashamed of the part he has played. I can feel for him, too, when I think of my own feelings when I thought I had lost you, Aimée."

We had now reached the dining-room door, and while I had been speaking Aimée had (after a little trouble with the rusty lock) opened the door. A blast of cold air seemed to rush at us, and we both heard a deep sigh. Aimée started and turned pale, then she tried to laugh and go on into the room, saying, "See, Dick, how nervous and fanciful you have made me. I thought I heard someone

sigh." As if in answer to this speech we both heard again the same deep sigh, this time repeated close to us, and at the same moment Aimée turned deadly pale and exclaimed, "Oh! Richard, Richard, did you see that man just now? He passed close to us, and seemed to wave his arm as if to keep us back. Look now! Did you see him this time? He was so distinct."

I shook my head, and was about to answer in the negative when I, too, saw the misty outline of a man's form just inside the door. The figure raised its arms and seemed to wave us back. Even as I looked the form faded and was gone, but that glimpse was enough for me. I was not going to allow Aimée to run any risk, and so I took her arm and led her away to the front door saying, "Enough, Aimée. I believe too thoroughly in this house being haunted to allow you to remain another minute. That ghost, whoever he was, is right, and we are better out of the place."

CHAPTER XII.

Aimée, much startled by what she had seen in the old house, was by no means averse to take my advice, so we both drew the hall door to once more and locked it, putting the keys into a small basket she carried. She had a little white shawl over her arm, while I carried her waterproof and our umbrellas.

Just as we reached the little path that led down to the lake and came in full view of the boat, we saw someone tall and very like the person we had been speaking of, Jack Masters, standing by the boat apparently examining it. To say we were astonished hardly expresses our feelings—we were more than annoyed by his appearance at such an inopportune moment. But I resolved to greet him as usual, and to take no notice in Aimée's presence of anything. Accordingly I held out my hand as Jack (for it was indeed he) raised his head at the sound of our footsteps, and said, as quietly as I could, "Well, Masters, how are you? This is indeed an unexpected meeting. Miss Challoner and I have been to see that the old house was all right, and I am now going to row her back.

We are staying with the O'Briens, you know, the father of young O'Brien whom I think you met in London."

Jack's answer was a strange, almost furtive look at Aimée, and a sullen smile at me that had more of a scowl in it as he held out his hand and shook ours in a violent way suggestive of a desire to wrench our arms off. He muttered something about having heard that we were at Bally Brack and that he had intended to call some day, and if I would row him across the lake he would go up to the house with us and make a call on the family.

To this proposal I would gladly have objected, as I felt sure he meant some mischief, but I could not think of an excuse for doing so, and had to invite him into the boat with the best grace I could.

As he was standing by the boat he naturally offered his hand to Aimée, to help her into it, and she as naturally handed him the basket and the little white shawl she carried. As she did so the shawl slipped and fell into the water, and as I stooped to pick it out I suddenly remembered the strange vision seen by the lady in Genoa. Here was the old house at Ben's Hollow, the lake, the boat, we two young men, Aimée in her dark blue dress with her white shawl and little basket—all as seen by Mrs. Humphreys under the influence of the hypnotising doctor more than six months before. In the light of the events that had lately taken place, I could only regard the vision as a warning, and my impulse was not to enter the boat, but Aimée was already seated in the stern, and Jack had followed her and seemed half inclined to push off and leave me behind, for he had quickly unfastened the rope and the boat was beginning to float away; so I had no alternative but to jump in and take possession of the oars, resolving to keep a sharp eye on Jack's movements till I could run the boat ashore again and land. I determined to row straight across the lake and thus shorten the trip by half its length.

When I seated myself at the oars Jack settled himself in the bow of the boat, and thus we were seated just as described by Mrs. Humphreys in her clairvoyant trance; another coincidence by no means reassuring.

We had rowed almost across and were only about three to four hundred yards from the shore, I dividing my time between making occasional remarks to Aimée and watching Jack, who sat sullen and silent in the bow, scarcely seeming

to hear what I said to him; he appeared almost asleep when I looked at him.

I had just been making a common-place observation to them both about the O'Brien family, and Aimée was answering me, my attention for the moment being directed to her, when she suddenly looked over my head and uttered a sharp scream, which caused me to turn round just in time to see Jack with his arm raised, and a long, sharp knife in his hand, about to stab me in the back. His eyes glared at me like a maniac's, and his whole form and features had undergone a most extraordinary change; it was no longer my old friend Jack, the easy, good-natured, self-sufficient young man whom I had known for years. This was like another person, so awful was the change in him. All the evil passions of the human heart seemed to rage within him and glow in those awful eyes he fixed on mine. The craft and cruelty of the murderer, the violence and revengeful hatred, joined to the furtive look of some hunted animal, all were combined in his features and expression, distorted and changed by the terrible deed he had resolved to do.

To turn round and grasp his uplifted arm was the work of a moment, and then began one of the most terrible struggles imaginable. Jack fought and twisted and wrestled like a mad-man; his strength seemed like that of half-a-dozen men. I am fortunately one of those broad, muscular men, who, without being very tall, yet often have more real strength than many a tall man like Jack, whose frame had more size than strength about it. But to-day I was almost like a child in his grasp, and felt myself growing faint and weak and exhausted, and knew I could hold out no longer, when an end was most unexpectedly put to our struggle.

Aimée, who had at first been rendered almost helpless by alarm, now attempted herself to grasp Jack's arm, and in doing so, she leaned too much on the side of the boat, so that it capsized, and we were all thrown into the water. Jack was under me, and was so blinded and choked by the water that he relaxed his hold of me and sank. It was all over in less than a moment. Fortunately I am a good swimmer, and as soon as I found myself freed from the clutch of Jack's hands, my first thought was of Aimée. She had sunk on being thrown into the water, and now rose a little distance from me, and I was able to swim to her and hold her up

before she could sink again. She was wonderfully quiet and collected, and on my asking her if she could float replied "Yes," but that her dress was getting so heavy with the water that she did not think she could keep up long.

The boat was floating bottom up at a little distance from us; I managed to make my way to it and get Aimée upon it, and it afforded us a temporary resting place. I divested myself of my coat and boots, and thus freed I was able to swim to the shore for assistance, leaving Aimée to sit upon the boat till my return. I was very reluctant to leave her even to obtain help, but as the water was very cold and she was already much exhausted, we decided her chance would be better if she could remain on the boat till I returned. Of Jack I saw no trace; indeed it was getting so dark that I could not see far, and had almost to guess where the shore was from the outlines of the hill, whose top I could see rising darkly against the sky.

I had a long, exhausting swim, and was almost benumbed with cold before I reached the shore and scrambled up the bank, and almost crawled to a light I could see in the window of a small cabin near. The man had a boat in which he used to fish in the lake, and as rapidly as possible I got him to row out in search of Aimée and the upturned boat, fearful that she might have sunk exhausted with cold before we could reach her. I had told her to shout in answer to us, for it was getting so dark under the shadow of the hills that it was difficult to distinguish objects at a distance. To my joy our shouts were answered, faintly it is true, but by Aimée's voice, and soon we were alongside the upturned boat, and I lifted Aimée into ours and wrapped her in a cloak which I had brought, belonging to the fisherman's wife. We had also got a little whisky with us and I made Aimée drink some; she was half dead with cold, and it did wonders in the way of reviving her. When we got back to the cottage there was a good peat fire burning, and I carried her up from the boat and laid her down in front of it, while the good woman and her stalwart daughter rubbed Aimée's cold hands and feet, and gradually got some warmth into her again.

A messenger had been sent to Bally Brack while I had gone with the boat, and he presently returned with the carriage and some dry clothes for both of us, and Mr. O'Brien and his daughter to render us assistance.

Great was the fuss they made over us, their kindness was wonderful, and many were the questions we had to answer as to how it had all happened.

I had taken the precaution before our friends arrived to arrange with Aimée that we would say nothing of the murderous attack Jack had made upon me, but ascribe it all to the accidental upsetting of the boat when we were changing places in it.

I could not forget that Jack had once been my friend, and whether he were living or had been drowned I could not bring myself to brand him as a would-be murderer.

I had already sent our friend the boatman to look for Jack, and Mr. O'Brien despatched messengers to find if there were any tidings of him in the neighbourhood. He was, I knew, a good swimmer, and I had a hope that the instinct of self-preservation would make him strike out for the shore, provided he rose to the surface, as I had done, with consciousness sufficient to help himself. To Mr. O'Brien I only said that we had met Mr. Masters at Ben's Hollow, and that as he had known Gerald O'Brien slightly in London, he had proposed to return with us in the boat and call at Bally Brack. What had brought him to Ireland and to Ben's Hollow was unknown to me.

We were driven home to Bally Brack, and, once there, were very glad to retire to our own rooms and go to our beds, for the chill and exposure were likely to result in bad colds, if not in more serious illness, and getting warm in bed seemed the wisest precaution to take. I had a regular reception in my bedroom after dinner of all the gentlemen staying in the house, and had to sit up in bed and repeat over again all about our adventure, and to listen to all the wonderful tales of a like nature known to my visitors or their friends, a penance from which Aimée was saved by the prompt action of Miss O'Brien, who installed herself in Aimée's room and would let no one enter. To her Aimée confided the truth, and told her what we had seen at the old house. She also asked her opinion as to the best means of unravelling the mystery of the strange events.

From what I had myself seen and experienced, and from all that Aimée had told me, I was now most anxious to find the key to these mysterious hauntings and to learn in what way our lives were connected with them. I felt that those

who had devoted time and money to the investigation of these subjects would be the best people to advise and help us now, and I wished to ask Miss O'Brien if some of her Spiritualist friends could assist us to discover how an apparently good-natured, well-disposed young man, such as Jack Masters had always seemed, could thus develop such murderous tendencies, and display an amount of revenge and spite hardly in keeping with his previous somewhat frivolous character.

I passed a sleepless night, revolving in my mind all these things, and haunted by the vision of my old friend lying dead at the bottom of the lake, or else wandering about the country a danger to himself and others. Then I would wonder whether I was right in keeping to myself the fact of his attack upon me, whether I should not tell someone, in order to prevent him from doing more mischief should he be still alive and at large.

As the result of my anxiety I arose next morning tired and haggard-looking, but too restless to remain in the house, so soon after breakfast I walked over to the village to hear if there were any news of Jack.

I had learnt on inquiring for Aimée that she had taken a chill and was too unwell to leave her room. This news made me very anxious about her, but Miss O'Brien, who was taking charge of her, assured me that there was no cause for alarm, and almost insisted on my going to inquire about Jack as I had proposed, promising to let me see Aimée on my return if she was well enough to get up.

I therefore made my way down to the Constabulary Barracks at M——, and discovered that the inspector was just going to send a messenger up to Bally Brack to say that Mr. Masters had been found, that he was alive, but suffering from fever and delirium, and was dangerously ill. He was at a small farmhouse, about two miles from the lake, where he must have wandered for shelter. He was wet and cold, and seemed "dazed-like," the people said, and had told them that he had been upset out of a boat, and wanted a bed for the night. After he went to bed he had been heard tossing about and muttering to himself as though he were speaking to someone, and went on so strangely that some of the farmer's family had sat up with him all night, and towards morning he seemed "to go quite off his head," and got so excited that

the doctor had been sent for from M——, and it was from him that the constabulary had learned his whereabouts.

I went at once and saw the doctor. He was a mild, quiet man, who seemed to have no ideas outside his profession, though he appeared capable and clever enough in his own routine of practice.

To this doctor I confided the true history of the accident to the boat, asking him to keep it as private as possible, and giving it as my opinion that Jack must have been suffering from delirium at the time—a view the doctor at once supported—thanking me for the help my narrative gave him in judging of the case. I did not, however, venture to express my other opinion, viz., that Jack was perhaps suffering from a form of what in the old days was termed “possession,” and that he was not responsible for his actions.

The doctor having assured me that an experienced nurse should be got to watch my friend, with a couple of men to help in case of need, I felt my mind greatly relieved, and readily agreed to his suggestion that I should not attempt to see Jack for the present, as my doing so would only be likely to excite him still more. News of the patient's progress should be sent to Bally Brack, and I should at once be sent for if he got worse. I also wrote to the address of Jack's relatives in England to tell them that he was seriously ill, in case any of them wished to come over and look after him, and then feeling I had done all that was possible, I returned to Bally Brack to report to Mr. O'Brien and his sister what I had done.

Miss O'Brien told me that Aimée was up and dressed and most anxious to see me, and that she would take me to her room, as Aimée felt too unnerved to go downstairs amongst the other people in the house. I found Aimée better than I expected as regarded her cold, but her nerves were terribly shaken by all that she had passed through. At the time she had behaved wonderfully, and shown great courage and self-control, but now that the danger was passed she had completely broken down and was almost hysterical. She was greatly relieved to hear that Jack had been found and that he would be watched, as she was haunted by the fear that he might make another attack upon me.

To her and to Miss O'Brien I told more fully than I had done before all about the strange change that had come over my friend during the last winter. How sullen and ill-tem-

pered he had grown, how he had begun to drink, and gamble, and swear. How he had quarrelled with many of his former friends as well as myself, and taken to associate with the most dissipated characters. In short, he had become almost like another man, and at last we arranged that Miss O'Brien should get some of her spiritualistic friends to come over to Ireland and hold a séance at Ben's Hollow, to find out if possible the reason of these hauntings and the mysterious connection between them and the strange conduct of my once friend Jack Masters. That there was some connection was evident, and it was rendered not the less strange by the vision seen in Genoa by Mrs. Humphreys—a vision that seemed sent as a warning, since but for it neither Aimée nor I would have watched Jack so closely as we had done, and, though we could not prevent the fulfilment of the vision, yet there was no doubt our lives were saved by our being forewarned and our suspicions aroused. Miss O'Brien was also of opinion that Jack's conduct would all be explained and himself benefited if we could obtain the key to these mysteries.

Aimée was at first afraid to allow anyone to go to the house again, but was reassured by Miss O'Brien's assurance that she would get people to assist us on whose practical sense and extensive knowledge of the subject she could rely.

The next week passed quietly. Aimée was confined to the house by her cold, and I, of course, contrived to be a good deal with her and our kind and sympathetic friend Miss O'Brien. The rest of the party were as usual a good deal out of doors, spending their time on tennis, etc., so we had some delightful moments by ourselves.

Jack was dangerously ill for several days and then the crisis passed, and we heard that he was, though weak, yet on the road to recovery. I did not think it advisable to see him, but I inquired every day at the farm, and, during his danger, had messages sent from the doctor to say how he was.

CHAPTER XIII.

Towards the end of the week Miss O'Brien heard from the friend in London to whom she had written, saying that he had arranged to come over to Ben's Hollow with three friends of his, who were all strong mediums and who had been selected by his spirit guides as suitable for the proposed circle. This gentleman, whom I shall call Mr. Laurie, was a man of considerable scientific attainments and much practical experience. He had, moreover, been engaged in the study of Spiritualism since its first appearance under that name more than forty years ago. We felt, therefore, that we were in safe hands, and it was with more curiosity and desire for knowledge than fear that we made our arrangements for visiting Ben's Hollow once more.

Mr. Laurie and his friends were to remain at the hotel at M——, and we three could leave Bally Brack to dine and spend the evening with them, and then we could quietly make our way over to Ben's Hollow.

The day after we got Mr. Laurie's letter he duly arrived with his friends, a lady and two gentlemen, and with us three and young Gerald O'Brien (who was most anxious to be allowed to join the party, and who promised not to tell his father or anyone) we made up a party of eight persons.

Gerald had begged his aunt so much to take him that we decided to let him accompany us. He was bright, clear-headed, and certainly not imaginative nor likely to allow his fancy to play him any tricks, and as an independent witness his presence was useful.

The night selected for holding our circle at Ben's Hollow proved fine. There was no moon, but the sky was clear and the stars shone brightly; there was very little wind, and, though cool, it was not a cold night.

We dined at M—— with Mr. Laurie and his friends, and then drove to a small shanty about half a mile from Ben's Hollow. There we left the cars and walked over to the old house.

It lay very dark and still, the trees scarcely stirred, and the desolation and decay were not visible by the dim light of our lanterns. We had brought candles and matches, and a little pocket lamp that lighted automatically in a most ingenious way. It was nearly nine o'clock when we reached

the house, and by the direction of the spirit guides of Mr. Laurie we were to hold our circle in the dining-room at that hour.

As we crossed the gardens and passed up the steps on to the terrace we all saw for a moment a bright light, like a ball of fire of bluish colour, flit to and fro in one of the upper windows of the dark pile of buildings before us, and then come outside and cross the garden at the other side and go down to the lake. We decided not to follow it, however. As we opened the hall door a gust of cold wind met us, and made us shiver as though we were in mid winter. We had three dark lanterns with us, and I could not help thinking we must look like a lot of burglars or conspirators.

We locked the front door to prevent any chance of outsiders (in the mortal form) entering, and as we did so we all heard a low mocking laugh that echoed and re-echoed till it seemed to die away in the distance.

Mr. Laurie, who was walking first carrying one of the lanterns, stopped and adjured the spirit to stand back from our path, and not to seek to interfere with us. This adjuration was answered by a deep sigh that echoed and re-echoed as the laugh had done.

We all then entered the dining-room, and after making a careful search to ascertain that no one was concealed in it, we were directed to lock the door and give the key to Gerald O'Brien. The guiding spirit, by whose directions we acted, then told us not to be alarmed by whatever we might see or hear; we were engaged in a good work and would be protected from all harm, but we must ourselves assist by keeping calm and firm, and exerting our own will-power to resist all attempts to influence or control any one except those who were to act as the mediums. These were the two gentlemen Mr. Laurie had brought with him—a Mr. Blandford and a Mr. Hawthorne. We were told that the advanced spirits, who were helping and protecting us, would allow Mr. Blandford to become entranced first, and that an unhappy spirit, whom we could aid to release himself from his present earth-bound condition, would show himself to us, as well as a bright spirit who had impressed us to hold this meeting for the purpose of aiding the unhappy one.

Before we locked the door, however, we collected some old chairs and a table from the hall and a small room oppo-

site, and placing the chairs in a circle round the table, we carefully locked the door and gave the key to Gerald O'Brien. We then darkened our lanterns and placed them on the floor where we could easily get them at any time. There was now only a very faint light in the room, so that we could barely distinguish each other.

Mr. L—— then offered up a prayer for help and guidance, and we all joined in singing a Spiritualist song. Very soon we felt the icy wind blowing over us again, then the table was lifted a few feet in the air, and then let down once or twice. This was followed by a sound of rushing and hurrying feet behind us, and a deep sigh sounded close to my ear.

Mr. Blandford now became entranced, and seemed to pass into a deep sleep. I had never seen anyone in a trance before, and was greatly interested, trying to watch him.

Lights now began to appear and to flit about in all directions, while Miss O'Brien, Aimée, and two of the other sitters who were clairvoyant, saw an immense number of bright spirits forming a circle round us, while beyond them there appeared an immense mass of dark, moving forms that seemed indistinct, but which kept drawing near, and then were repelled again by the bright ones.

Twice the room quivered and shook as by a miniature earthquake, and there was a rushing and trampling of heavy feet and muttering of voices, but we could not distinguish the words.

This was followed by a tremendous noise overhead, as of heavy furniture being flung about with violence, then such a rushing, trampling, shouting, and screaming, as though Bedlam had been let loose. Pistol shots were heard, and men's voices shouting and yelling in a way beyond my power to describe, and it was only by a great effort that we all kept quiet and in our places. Suddenly the whole room seemed to be lighted up with a strange bluish light, and for one brief moment the walls became transparent, and we saw the hall and staircase crowded with fighting and struggling men, who surged into the dining-room where we sat.

Then we saw a tall, handsome man, with curling brown hair, dressed in a rich velvet dress of the last century, who was fighting, sword in hand, against several soldiers. He seemed hemmed into one corner, and to be fighting desperately to cut his way out. Then another soldier from behind

raised his pistol and fired; the tall, fair gentleman fell with a deep groan, and the noise ceased, the lights went out, and the vision vanished as suddenly as it had appeared, and we were once more seated alone in the dim empty room, a voice asking us in a tone of deep anguish to pray for one who had been guilty of a treacherous murder.

Mr. L——, in response to this voice, offered up an earnest prayer, in which we all joined, and at the end a deep voice said "Amen" three times distinctly.

Then we sang again, Mr. Blandford, the medium, being still in a deep trance, and as we sang the lights began to flicker round us again, and presently a shadowy form, like a vapour, seemed to rise from the floor and then grow gradually solid, till a tall man, in a white robe trimmed with blue and red, stood before us.

He had a fine countenance and an air of much dignity as he spoke. He said, "Friends, I thank you for your help this night. May God protect you all, and fill your hearts with pity for the unhappy being who will show himself to you this night, and tell you of his crime and its most awful punishment. Give to him your earnest prayers that he may be aided to release himself from his present sad and awful state of darkness and misery. Speak to him words of hope, and tell him there is indeed pardon for all who seek it, for his ears are deaf to the voices of the higher spirits who would help him, and his position seems to himself one of endless misery—an eternal hell. Speak then to him, and help him with your prayers and with hope, and I, who am his brother, the brother whom he betrayed to death, will ever thank and bless you."

Mr. Laurie asked, "Will you give us your name, friend, that we may know you again?" whereupon the spirit replied, "I was known on earth as Martin McMurrough, and it is for his share in my death as well as for other sins that my brother John is now tied and earth-bound to this house, where he enacts over and over again the tragedy of his crime, and of his own death which followed soon after. Pray that he be released and helped to progress, and he will hear your prayers."

As he spoke these words the tall form faded, and in a moment was gone from our eyes.

After the disappearance of the tall form we resumed our singing, and shortly the mist rose again and formed into

the likeness of a man, but a very different one to the other. This man was all shrouded in a dark, almost black, robe with a sort of hood over the head; the face—we could not see it—was as though it was veiled with something like dark grey gauze almost like cobweb. The figure was bent and bowed down as by a very heavy load, and it sank at our feet in an attitude of penitent misery, covering the face with its hands, and crouching down, as it seemed, in the very dust. This figure moaned and wrung its hands, and then, in answer to Mr. Laurie, who spoke to it in kindly words of hope and comfort, said in a faint voice that was like a husky whisper: "Alas, alas! for me there is no hope. There can be none for one who betrayed others to death, even his own brother. Ah me! Ah me! I must remain in this most awful state, this hell that I have made, for ever! How can I dare to hope? Alas! alas!"

I can find no words to convey the intense misery, the sadness and hopelessness of the tones of that poor spirit's voice. Mr. Laurie again spoke to him, assuring him that many such as himself, whose crimes had been as great, were now, by their own efforts and their repentance, raised to brighter states and higher spheres, and that some of them would gladly help him if he would turn to them for aid, and would himself strive earnestly to climb the path of progression which would lead him also to those brighter spheres. As Mr. Laurie spoke the spirit raised his head and seemed to listen anxiously, and when Mr. Laurie paused, asked him to repeat again those words, and requested us all to pray for him that some of those spirits who had sinned as he had done and passed through his present state of darkness and despair might come to him now, that he might be permitted to see even one of them as a proof that this hope we spoke of was a truth and not a bright vision that would fade and leave him again in that endless night. Mr. Laurie then once more prayed very earnestly, and we all mentally joined. As Mr. Laurie ceased to speak the spirit sank apparently through the floor and vanished, and the voice of Mr. Laurie's spirit guide was heard, telling us that the poor spirit had not left us, but that it was thought best that he should now control one of the other mediums and speak through him; thereupon Mr. Hawthorne became also entranced and controlled by the spirit of John McMurrough.

It is impossible for me to give in detail all that was said by Mr. Laurie and the unhappy spirit; suffice it to say that after the poor spirit had, in broken sentences, with many tears, told us how he had so grown to hate his brother Martin, and so longed to rob him of his inheritance that he had betrayed him to the Government and thus compassed his death without suspicion falling on himself, Mr. Laurie asked him if he would not desire to see his brother and ask pardon of him as a proof of his sincere repentance.

The spirit seemed at first terrified, and to shrink from the idea of seeing one whom he had so deeply injured, but, after a moment, he exclaimed, "Yes! yes! I would see him; and if he does indeed forgive me, I shall believe that God—that great and awful God to whom I dare not even pray, may forgive me also."

As the poor spirit spoke these words, the form of Martin appeared amongst us once more, and at the sight of him, his unhappy brother cowered down at his feet almost embracing them and imploring pardon.

The form of Martin stooped over the prostrate figure, and, laying his hands on the head of the crouching man, said, in those full gentle tones we had heard before—

"My brother! still my brother to me, I have long since forgiven you, and prayed that the great and merciful God would pardon you also. It is by His mercy and as a proof to you of His pardoning love, that I am here visible to your eyes to-night. Take then my hand, and let mine be the happiness to lead you to that brighter life. Let it be my privilege to show you the pathway to that bright land of hope and light where you shall live a new life, and by your good actions atone for all the evils of your past."

He bent down as he spoke till he knelt beside the stricken figure, and drew the weary head to his breast, as a mother might do with her sorrowing child, and then, pointing with his hand to the corner of the room, he said, "Look! look! my brother. Behold that star of hope that dawns for you now, and may your eyes be opened to see the bright band of spirits who have come to bear you away from this your prison-house, to that land of hope and promise."

We all looked as he spoke at the corner of the room to which he pointed, and saw the loveliest and most beautiful star-like light imaginable, while many smaller lights appeared

flickering round, and those who were clairvoyant among us said they saw a most beautiful band of spirits, who bore these lights in their hands and floated down to where the brothers knelt, and formed a circle round them. I saw only the lights that formed into a circle round the bright star and the two kneeling forms, and then Martin's form seemed to melt and fade and grow fainter, while the other sank insensible on the floor, and a voice asked us to sing once more.

As we did so the lights died out, the form of Martin vanished completely, and the voice of Mr. Laurie's spirit guide was heard wishing us all "Good-night, and God bless you," and thanking us for the help we had given. He also bade us leave the house as soon as possible, and carry Mr. Hawthorne and Mr. Blandford into the air, but not to turn up the lights till they became conscious; and, with another good-night, the voice ceased, and there was nothing more seen or heard but the noise made by ourselves leaving the house. The mediums were much exhausted, and we had to wait a little before we could return and lock up the house, which Mr. Laurie and I remained behind to do, while the others walked on to where we had left the cars.

While we were locking up the dining-room, the front door, which we had left open, was suddenly slammed to with great violence, and we heard a wild savage laugh ring through the house and then stop abruptly. Heavy feet came tramping down the stairs and across the hall, but, though we turned the lantern up, we could see no one. Then a voice began muttering, and cursing, and swearing, and something more like a grey misty pillar (so formless was it) than anything else rushed past us, and at the same moment Mr. Laurie's guide spoke, telling us to lose no time in leaving the house, the reason why we would learn afterwards.

We accordingly went at once to the front door and tried to open it, but, though we exerted all our strength, we could not move it. A curious oppressive feeling came over me, and I felt as though some heavy body was leaning up against me, but I could see nothing. Mr. Laurie and I kept tugging and pulling at the door till Mr. Laurie in despair called out: "In the name of God who and what are you, and why do you hold the door against us?"

Again came that wild laugh in our ears and a heavy foot close beside us stamped three times on the floor, Mr. Laurie

then said: "I call on all good spirits to aid us that we may now leave this house in peace and safety." As he spoke the door yielded so suddenly that we nearly fell back; we took the opportunity to quit the place as soon as possible, and as we turned the key in the lock we heard again that horrid laugh die away through the empty house.

I cannot say how the rest of the party felt, but I know I was uncommonly glad to find myself back in the well-lighted room at the hotel in M——, drinking hot mulled port and eating some supper, for we were all much exhausted and very hungry, and thus ended this most extraordinary visit to the haunted house.

Mr. Laurie and his friends having accomplished the object of their visit did not remain many days in M——, but before they left, a séance was held in Mr. Laurie's rooms at the hotel, at which the spirits of Martin McMurrough and one of Mr. Laurie's guides appeared and spoke to us. They explained that though we had assisted in releasing the spirit of John McMurrough from his earth-bound condition yet the house was haunted by many others who were tied to the scene of their earthly dissipations, and that there was one spirit who haunted it with the most malignant feelings towards all who visited the house. This was the spirit of old Ben Holdfast himself, the original founder of the house, a man whose life on earth had been cruel and extremely evil, and whose only endeavour since he passed into spirit life had been to work harm to others, so that he was still far from that state of repentance which would make it possible to help him. When he would progress no one could say; he would ultimately do so, since it was a universal law that all must in time progress, but in his case, as in many others, many centuries often elapsed before they did. If we desired to benefit the other and less evil spirits who haunted it it could best be done by burning down the house, a course which would thus release them from their earthly magnetism with which the house was filled, and which kept them still tied to the spot. The destruction of the house would also destroy in a great measure old Ben's power to do harm, and would thus prove an indirect benefit to him.

Martin's spirit likewise said that some day he would write his own and his brother's history through Miss O'Brien, and we would then see for ourselves how needful it was that such a centre of evil should be destroyed. No one, he said,

could again safely inhabit the house, or hope to live in peace in it, since the power to produce disturbances and to do harm had increased, not diminished, since it was last inhabited. A spirit like Ben's drew round him many like himself, and it had required the exercise of an amount of power exerted by a much greater number of good and advanced spirits to protect us during our visit to the house than we could well imagine, and their anxiety to hasten our departure was due to the fact that our weakened and exhausted condition made it more easy for the spirits of Ben and his followers to control and influence us. Only the importance of such a work as the release of his unhappy brother could have brought so many advanced spirits to aid and protect us during our visit to such a place.

In reply to my question "Whether old Ben's spirit could obtain control over anyone with whom he had come into close contact in that house?" I was answered: "Can you ask such a question when you have in your own friend an instance of such possession—of such overshadowing? He could not influence anyone, but there are many whom he could so control and work upon as to make them at last his slaves. Can you not yourself trace the change in your friend from the time that the shadow of that dark and evil spirit rested on him? Not all at once could he thus control your friend, but with each successful effort his power grew stronger, till at last the two became almost merged in one, and the unfortunate young man felt drawn to those places that were the haunts of the spirit that possessed him. The feeling experienced by many of having lived before in scenes to which, in their present life, they are strangers is often due to the fact that a spirit to whom these scenes are familiar, is, unknown to themselves, sharing their life and impressing their thoughts. I cannot now enter into this subject, though at another time I may do so. It is of your friend I would now speak, and ask you to look back and recall the time of your first visit to Ben's Hollow, and his foolish boast, made in the pride of his ignorance, that he was equal to all the ghosts that might haunt the old place. His nature was not strong enough to resist the suggestions of the evil spirit, and his natural pride and selfishness made him an easy prey. There are many who pass their lives on your earth as good people, simply because their virtue has never been tried; temptation

has not come to them where they are weakest, and they take credit to themselves that they are not as those who have sinned and fallen, yet in the moment of trial they would fail and fall, even as those whom they are so swift to condemn. Think of those old words in your Bible, that book filled with the thoughts of many wise minds, 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' As to your friend, he will do well now the spell is broken, and he has those with him from our side of life who will help him, and give him strength and protection. Yet it would be well for him to leave this spot and return no more. Give him this advice, and perhaps he may be more ready to heed it, and so believe that there may be mysteries which he, with his abilities limited by the ties of earth, cannot yet fathom."

Martin's spirit then thanked us all again in his brother's name and his own for our help and sympathy, and said that in time when John's spirit was stronger he would come in person to thank us all, and, bidding us good night, he left us, and the circle terminated.

To say that I was not astonished and bewildered by all that I had seen and heard would be untrue, but I was also firmly convinced that all that I had experienced was a reality. No mere words can convey any true idea of the actuality of these phenomena to those who have not themselves witnessed them, and if anyone should think that I was too easily converted to Spiritualism I can only say that the nature of my experiences left no room in my mind for doubt, and that, as I am only writing this as a simple narrative of what I saw and felt, and not to explain all the mysteries of Spiritualism, I have necessarily had to condense much of what I witnessed, and have not entered into the question of proof at all. To those who may be curious about such subjects I say, "Go and learn for yourselves, make your own investigations into these things."

The day after our séance at Mr. Laurie's rooms, I found on going to enquire for Jack that he was much better and wished to see me.

Accordingly I was shown into his room and found him propped up in bed, very weak and much changed, but more like my old friend than I had seen him for months. His pale face flushed at the sight of me, and as I held out my hand to him, saying, "Well, Jack, I am glad to see you better ;





that you have turned the corner at last; you'll soon pick up now," he grasped my hand with his feeble fingers and burst into tears. I did my best to soothe him, and after a while he grew calmer, and looking earnestly into my face said, "Dick, old fellow, how good you are to me—too good. Tell me what all this means? What have I been doing lately? My mind has been all confused. I thought I had been doing all sorts of things. I thought the devil himself was urging me on to kill you in that boat. I'd been thinking of it for weeks, and seemed compelled to follow you over here and kill you somehow. I must have been out of my mind. I fancied I was myself and someone else too, all at the same time. I don't know clearly what I've been doing. How did it all happen that afternoon?" He stopped exhausted, still holding my hand and regarding me with much intentness. I did not want to tell him all then in his weak state, so I said briefly that he had been ill—for long, the doctor said, but that he was all right now, and when he got better we could talk it all over, and I would explain all that was strange to him. I was so hopeful and so much happier myself that I made him feel brighter too, and I left him at last contented and happy in the complete renewal of our old friendship. Of Aimée we did not speak, and it was not till he was well and strong again that I told him of my engagement to her. He was a little downcast for a time, but as he had quite given up all idea of winning her himself he soon became reconciled to my marriage, and before very long consoled himself by finding another young lady to whom he transferred his affections.

Before leaving Ireland Miss O'Brien gave me a manuscript, which she left for our perusal, saying she knew it would interest us, as it was the promised narrative of the spirit Martin McMurrough, dictated by himself to her wider spirit control, and I think I cannot do better than present it to the reader as it was written, without any comments of my own, since the story is told far better than I could tell it.

PART III.—THE SPIRIT'S NARRATIVE.

CHAPTER XIV.

To you, kind friend, who will write these my words for me, I desire to give a slight picture not only of a life on earth, but of its consequences as seen in that other life, which is indeed the true life.

I can best make my history clear by going back to the time when the founder of our family, known as old Ben Holdfast, died. His life on earth was stained by many crimes; he was guilty of more than one cruel murder, and had sent many of his unoffending tenantry to a cruel death at the caprice of his own hard nature. He kept up a pretence of piety, while his real life was one of the worst dissipation, and he proved false alike to friends and enemies. His greed of money would have led him to sell his own father, had it been made worth his while, and no feeling of remorse ever caused him to hesitate in clearing from his path (by death, if needful) anyone who stood in his way.

During his last illness he made a great show of repentance. He had the clergyman constantly with him during his last hours, and having left a handsome sum of money to endow a church in the parish, died in the firm belief that this would greatly help to save him from the consequences of the life he had led. Such a man, on passing into the other life, finds himself in a state of darkness and discomfort, haunted by his past crimes and by living memories of his earth life. Those whom he had killed in gratification of his ambition and his revenge now rose up against him as avengers in their turn. A weaker nature, or one less steeped in evil, might have turned to thoughts of repentance, and tried even in that terrible place to do some good to atone for all the evil he had done. But to old Ben Holdfast good was so entirely foreign—he had so shut himself out on earth from all the promptings of goodness in any shape—that his only desire was to visit upon others the miseries he endured himself, and his intensely powerful will enabled him by exerting its force to return again to earth, and to the house that held so much of his earthly magnetism.

And thus he became one of those haunting spirits whose presence becomes an actual danger to such mortals as come in contact with them, though his powers for mischief were

considerably checked by the presence (unseen by him) of many bright spirits who act as guardians and guides to those of better natures and nobler aspirations, and save their charges from many dangers and temptations. Yet when he found natures akin to his own he was able to work upon their evil propensities, and to incite them to many crimes.

Could mortals see as we do the many influences for good and evil that surround them, they would feel less inclined to rely upon themselves and their own power, and more ready to look for help and guidance to those whose advancement and knowledge enable them to advise and protect. The spirit of Ben saw none of the brightness of earth and earth life, though he still lived in its atmosphere. For him the sun never shone, no light appeared. The darkness which enveloped himself shut out every light, and the only mortals who were clearly visible to him were such as had similar propensities. Such he could influence, and through their organisms he could still enjoy many of the debasing pleasures of his earthly life. He also drew around him many other spirits like himself, and their time was spent chiefly in annoying each other, and doing harm to such mortals as they could influence.

The worst part of their position was its utter hopelessness. They had ever been taught that their punishment would be eternal, and they believed it to be so, and they looked upon any of the other spirits who tried to undeceive them as fools of the same sort as those people who had deluded them on earth with assurances of pardon, which had proved quite delusive, for here they were, with all their sins still to suffer for, as much as if they had made no profession of religious belief, and given no money to purchase to themselves a pardon. Even among those unfortunate spirits whom he had drawn round him the powerful mind of Ben Holdfast made him a sort of ruler or king, and he and his attendant spirits exercised a very deteriorating influence over the dwellers in the old house, and the family soon became noted for the reckless extravagance and dissipation of its members. Many of them came to violent ends, either in duels, or when engaged in hopeless conspiracies against the ruling powers, and several died by their own hands, till it came to be said that it was seldom a McMurrough of Ben's Hollow died quietly in his bed.

The family thus gradually died out till at last my father

was the sole representative of the direct branch of the family descended from old Ben Holdfast's daughter and her husband, Daniel McMurrough. This Daniel was the son of the McMurrough from whom the property had been wrested, and it was said that old Ben had forced his daughter into the marriage to secure the title beyond dispute.

My brother John and myself were twins, and as I happened to be the elder by a few hours, John felt as though an injustice had been done to him. He was always remarkable as a strange, morose sort of a boy, given to violent fits of passion, and he would keep up a "grudge," as it is called, for months till chance gave him an opportunity of revenge. As I happened to be of a different disposition, the natural consequence was that I was popular, while he was disliked, and all these things helped to estrange us still more, and to ripen my brother's dislike into a species of brooding hatred of me. I myself have had, alas! to answer for many sins done by me in my earth life, and far be it from me to judge my brother, but since the telling of his story may prove of use to others as well as to himself, I can only tell it truly by tracing out the various circumstances and feelings that led to the tragedy of our deaths, and our subsequent sufferings and experiences in that world which lies beyond the grave.

As we grew up we ceased to quarrel so openly as we had done while boys. John went to live in Dublin, and I remained leading the life of an Irish country gentleman at Ben's Hollow—a life that had more of reckless dissipation about it than I care to recall now, since for me that life has become one of the painful memories of the past. Distance lends enchantment to the view, and with the space that parted us we began to take a more lenient view of each other's faults, and I even patched up a sort of friendship for John. When he came to see me, which he did at times, he made himself so agreeable and seemed so anxious to interest himself in my affairs in a friendly spirit that I, naturally of a careless disposition, soon came to trust and confide in him on many points.

At that time I was deeply involved, like many other Irish gentlemen, in preparations for the rising, afterwards known as the Rebellion of '98. To my astonishment John, whom I had always understood to be a supporter of the English Government, now informed me that he was as eager to turn out the intruders as anyone, and could greatly help us with special

and secret information if he were allowed to join us. In a moment of weakness I introduced him to my fellow conspirators as a new recruit to our band, and thus he learned all our secrets and all our plans, and then made use of the knowledge to destroy us with a careful villainy and a heartless deliberation that I could hardly understand, for his nature, though far from being noble, was yet not wholly bad, and he often displayed a weakness of character when forced to act for himself.

The motives of his conduct, however, became clearer to me afterwards when, on passing into spirit life, I was able to see that which was invisible to me before, viz., the crowds of spirits which follow and ever try to influence man on earth for good or for evil, because I then first saw that the spirit of old Ben had as it were overshadowed my unlucky brother almost from his birth. In John he found much that was congenial, and a nature whose will power was too weak to resist successfully the force of spirit power when brought to bear upon him. Had John never lived at Ben's Hollow I know not what his life might have been, for there are many things that we cannot see any more than you, and we ourselves can only surmise the cause of much that passes on your earth. Advanced spirits of a high order can of course see much that is hidden from us who still visit the earth, but they do not give us a clear explanation of why evil is permitted, nor can we explain to you why spirits such as Ben's are allowed to tempt and influence others, though we are told that it is in the power of everyone to resist them, and to obtain aid from bright and beautiful spirits in doing so. Such help and protection are never withheld from those who ask for them, as, alas! too few in the pride of their heart ever do.

Many explanations are given of these mysteries, and each must adopt that which seems best suited to their habits of thought. For myself I enter not into these controversies. I only know that such overshadowing or possession does take place, and that my brother was in some measure acting under the influence of that evil spirit, and at the same time under the promptings of his own evil passions, which gave old Ben the power to influence him. Of this spirit, and the fact that it haunted Ben's Hollow, we had often heard as boys, and there was one mysterious room, the window of which we could see from the outside of the house, but the entrance to

which had been built up and papered over, so that without taking down the wall of a passage it would have been difficult to find it.

This room was said to have been the one in which old Ben died, and after his death it had been so exceedingly and so unpleasantly haunted that his daughter and her husband had caused the wall to be built across the door, in order that no one might ever enter it again. From time to time there had been stories of old Ben being seen, but he had never done more than frighten people by appearing and disappearing suddenly, and so, though no one would go about the house alone after dark, yet he had come to be regarded as more annoying than dangerous, and besides, all old families of that period had their ghost, who was received quite as a member of the family, and thought to add to its respectability rather than otherwise. The serious side of the subject was never understood at that time.

Over my unhappy brother this evil spirit acquired at last complete sway, and by promptings and suggestions urged him on to learn all our secrets and then to betray our meetings to the Government, with the result already known to you. Amongst those killed in the fight in the house was a man of the name of Patrick Ryan, a leader among the rebels, and a man of powerful and determined character. This man, on being thus suddenly and violently hurried from an earthly life into another for which he was in no way prepared, naturally returned as a spirit to the place where all his hopes and desires had been centred, and was able to read the minds of my brother and his associates, and soon learned by what and by whose means he had been killed.

Filled with strong passions of revenge and hatred against the oppressors of his country, as he deemed them, he awoke in that new life as he had been in his earth life, and his first thoughts were to avenge himself on his murderer, as he considered my brother, and he watched and waited and haunted him till his opportunity came at last in the old house which had been the scene of his death, and where, owing to the influences with which it was saturated, and the grossly sensual company by whom it was filled, it was possible to materialise sufficiently to accomplish his intention, and to hurl my brother into spirit life in the same way and in as unprepared a state as he had been sent.

Not long after Patrick had killed my brother he felt overpowered by remorse and horror at what he had done, and the fate worse than death to which he had doomed his murderer, and he kept following the spirit of his victim in the vain hope that he might still be able to undo what he had done, or at least to help the spirit whom he had deprived of the chance of repenting while on earth.

CHAPTER XV.

Patrick Ryan was naturally of a noble disposition, wildly enthusiastic in the cause of his oppressed country, and for her freedom he would have hesitated at no sacrifice—even the lives of those most dear to him—but he had not naturally a cruel disposition, and he was ever ready to forgive those who wronged him. He was one of those spirits who progress rapidly in the spirit world, where they are freed from the false notions that prevail on earth about right and wrong, and where those who truly desire to do so can readily find teachers to enlighten them. He had befriended many on earth, and when his mind was no longer darkened by the one absorbing desire of revenge which had at first filled it, he learned the lesson which all must learn before they can progress—the lesson of that true nobility of character which would lead us to forgive our enemies, and rather seek to save them than to punish them; that lesson which teaches us that vengeance belongs to God alone, and none dare take upon themselves the avenger's part, since no one can with the limited power at our command presume to judge his brother, or say how far he is guilty. On earth men have the right to protect themselves and others from such as have lost the power to control themselves, and who thus become a danger to society; but the power of life and death belongs to God alone, and no man can exercise it without bringing on himself the guilt of murder. The degree of his guilt will be measured according to the motives that influenced his acts.

Patrick Ryan's first impulse, when he realised that he had been guilty in his revenge, was to seek out the man who

was at once his murderer and his victim, and try to help him. In spirit life to will is to do. Thus he found himself beside the spirit of the unhappy John almost as soon as he desired to be there, but the other fled from him in terror; and as Patrick, saddened and perplexed, sought to follow him, a bright spirit appeared by his side, and said: "Brother, seek not to follow him just now. Leave it to time and you shall yet aid him; and a day will come when he will no longer fly from you, nor reject the aid you offer him. Go, now, and seek to help others, for there are many in need of help, and at the right time you shall return to help him who was your enemy."

Then Patrick asked the bright one where should he go? Whom could he, an unhappy spirit himself, help? "There are many, my brother, who are worse and more unhappy than yourself, for to them the bright ones cannot show themselves at all. Go to them; tell them that to you hope has been given, and bid them to hope in their turn; bid them also strive to do some good, however small, and thus they shall advance and raise themselves from their dark places to brighter ones. You worked for others while on earth. You sympathised with, and sought to raise the oppressed and unhappy of your fellow-countrymen. Continue here to work for others, and you will thus undo past mistakes, and atone for your act of passion and revenge, and in time you shall even share the privilege of raising your enemy from his dark state, but not yet—he is not yet ready to receive your help; and true wisdom ever teaches us not to waste our labour on barren soil. Wait till the dews of sorrow have softened his heart, and made him ready to welcome your help. Take now this lamp that I give to you, and go forth into these dark places, and find those whose hearts are ripe for repentance, and to them speak your words of hope."

As the bright spirit spoke, he held out to Patrick a little lamp like a small bright star, which shed a faint silver light around him and dispelled the gloom for a few feet. With eager hands Patrick took the lamp, and thanking the bright spirit for his kind words and help, asked by what name he should enquire for him when he again sought his aid?

"I am known," answered the bright one, "as Hope, for I belong to the great Brotherhood of Hope. We have many such brotherhoods in spirit land, and we take the names of those virtues whose comfort we seek to bring into the sorrowful

hearts of those who have erred. Ask, then, for Hope, and if I cannot myself come to your call, another of our brotherhood will come in my stead. We are a vast band, and our members attend through all the spheres from the lowest to the highest. In every sphere you will find us, and since the higher ones cannot show themselves to those spirits who dwell in darkness, we appoint lower spirits who are still only working their way upwards from the darkness to visit their brothers in their sorrow, and show to them the light of hope. Do you, then, desire to join us, and carry our light into the seemingly hopeless darkness of these lower spheres?"

"Do I desire?" cried Patrick, "say rather—dare I ask to join you? I, who am not fit to assist others, since I could not control myself."

The bright spirit smiled as he said: "None can be so fit to aid sinners as those who have themselves sinned, and none can so truly sympathise with the suffering as those who have suffered. None can show the pathway out of the darkness so clearly as those who have themselves trodden it, and thus it is ever those who have themselves done evil, and have conquered the evil, who return to help their struggling brothers to climb the path of progress which they have themselves climbed. I, who speak to you, was myself in my earth life a great sinner. My nature was akin to your own, and led me into acts of passion and revenge, and thus it is I now seek to aid you, and to assure you that as I have risen, so you shall rise. As I have purified myself from my baser passions, so you shall do in your turn. The destiny of the soul is ever upwards, and there is no height that can be attained from which you may not behold fresh heights and fresh beauties stretching ever beyond. And just as our state seems heaven to your mind in this darkness, so there are spheres far beyond aught that even we can picture. To our state you may soon advance yourself, but those higher spheres of which I speak can only be reached after many ages shall have elapsed, and they may indeed be called the true heaven. Our land is indeed fair—indeed beautiful—and may well form to mortals the goal of their earthly hopes; may well prove a happy resting place in the journey to the higher spheres of the angels. Take then, the light I have given you, and go forth to seek the unhappy dwellers of this dark sphere and speak to them of the hopes I have given you—say to them what I have said to

you, and fear not—for many bright spirits shall guide and help you, unseen though they may be by your eyes. May the supreme Ruler of the Universe bless your efforts; and now, adieu."

As the bright spirit ceased to speak, he vanished from Patrick's gaze, and left him standing alone in the darkness, yet now not quite in the darkness, for the small lamp was in his hand glowing like a star, and—to his eyes so long accustomed to darkness—it seemed the most lovely thing he could behold, and a sure proof that all that had passed was not a fair dream that had faded from him. Eager to tell others, he hurried on through the dark country where he was, till he came to a cavern, so intensely dark, with such a thick and sombre darkness, that he feared to enter it lest the heavy atmosphere should extinguish his little light.

While he thus hesitated, his attention was attracted to what seemed a bundle of rags crouched in a heap near the entrance, and as he approached it with his light it moved, and showed the face of a man who looked up at him. To his horror and surprise he recognised in those awfully changed features one with whom he had been familiar on earth, a well-known public man, whose life had been notorious alike for his dissipations and his willingness to take bribes from either side. As the unhappy spirit recognised Patrick Ryan he uttered a shriek of misery and dismay, and fled into the depths of the murky cavern, where Patrick felt it better not to follow him, but went onward once more, and leaving these dark caverns behind him passed on to a dry sandy plain, where there appeared to be a sort of small town or rather a collection of dirty-looking hovels of the most miserable description. Here, however, the darkness was not so intense, there was a sort of dim twilight, and the atmosphere was thick and foggy.

At the door of one hovel a man was seated on a rude bench with a ragged cloak wrapped round him, and as Patrick approached he half uncovered his face to look at the little star, and then rose to inspect it nearer. As he did so, Patrick looked at him more attentively, and then, holding out his hand to grasp the other's lest he too should fly from him, exclaimed—

"Is it possible that we have met thus at last, my dear friend Martin McMurrough, as you were called on earth?"

Nay, turn not from me, my friend; I, too, am greatly changed, like yourself. I am a dweller in these dark spheres, but I am more fortunate than you, since I have had good news given me, and I would help you, my friend, if you will let me, by giving you a share in my hope, and showing you a way out of this unhappy place."

At the sound of his voice (for it was indeed myself), I, the then unhappy Martin fell at his feet, and shed bitter tears of humiliation, for I was blacker and darker than he, whereas on earth I had been almost as a patron to him, who was but the son of a farmer, and a humble leader of those wild rebels who vainly thought that by their weak power they could free their beloved country from a yoke so powerful as that of England.

It seemed hard that he should find me thus, in rags and misery. Yet his words were those of hope and kindness, and in my desolation I turned gladly to grasp any hand that could raise me up. I therefore drew him into the miserable hut that was all the habitation I could call my own, for I, who had lavished so much wealth on my own vain and selfish pleasures, without a thought of the misery and poverty around me, had laid up none of those true riches that can alone give happiness in spirit life. I had earned nothing spiritual, and I had nothing now to call my own in the spirit world but the bare walls which sheltered me. Yet even for that I was in a sense grateful, since it secured to me the privacy of my own thoughts, and was a refuge from the awful and degrading sights and sounds around me.

CHAPTER XVI.

The town in which I dwelt was called "The City of Unrest," for none of its wretched inhabitants could ever find rest or peace. Their time seemed to be passed in a constant endeavour to forget their past lives, by perpetually beginning new projects, which they never finished, for each would take a pleasure in spoiling the others' work, and annoying them in

various ways; and at the same time they would go on trying to repeat over again those pleasant vices that had formed their delight on earth, only to find that such enjoyments were now impossible for them. At times many would wander away in search of some new country that might prove better, and their places would be filled by fresh arrivals. Others seemed too hopeless to make any exertion, and would spend their time in a sort of dull apathy, brooding over their past lives, and despairing of any end to their present misery.

To this last class I belonged. On earth I had never displayed much energy or determination, nor endeavoured to learn anything that cost me trouble, for my position as the eldest son and heir to a fair fortune imposed on me no necessity to labour, and I soon lost in careless dissipation and pleasure any small share of energy I had naturally possessed. Thus, when I was killed in such a sudden and violent manner, I woke to find myself alone, in the dark plain that surrounded this City of Unrest. I seemed to wake from a deep sleep, or rather torpor, for I could recall, as in a dream, lying in some dark place that seemed to have walls, and being dimly conscious of forms moving around me that I could not see, but who appeared in some fashion to be ministering to my needs.

Then followed a period of blankness and unconsciousness, during which I knew nothing. How long this had lasted I was ignorant, but from that stupor I had wakened to find myself alone in the dark country, clothed in rags, and with my body so strangely and terribly altered that I shuddered at the sight of myself, for it was still myself, and I could trace the likeness of my former self; but, alas! whereas I had been thought a handsome man, I was now horrible to look upon. The drink I had so freely indulged in on earth had dulled and well nigh destroyed my intellect, and my life of pleasure, as I used to call it, had left its traces in my disfigured face and form. I was no longer tall and straight; I was almost deformed, and shrank to half my former size. I cannot continue or complete the description of myself. It is too painful to me, and it is moreover impossible to convey in words any idea of the terrible effects produced on the spiritual body by a life of sin on earth. Sin is a moral deformity, and stamps the spirit body according to the degree in which it has been indulged.

Thus, then, I was made to see that, whereas my friend Patrick was, indeed, still dark and unhappy-looking, with the stamp of his strong revengeful feeling marked on his haggard brow, yet—as his earthly life had been less selfish than mine, and the crime of my brother's death had been prompted by sudden anger at the injury done to himself, and not by sordid motives of gain—he, having already sincerely repented and tried to atone for it, did not look nearly so repulsive as I felt myself to be. Our positions were, therefore, now reversed, and to him I now turned for help and aid, as he had once turned to me. I could, moreover, now feel the influence of his strong will power and clear intellect. On earth I had not been a drunkard, in the usual sense of the term. I had never been a habitual sot, or loved solitary drinking, but after the fashion of that day and the custom of the company I kept, I used to get very tipsy more often than I care to remember, and had to be carried upstairs and put to bed by my servants after enjoying a friendly dinner with my chosen companions.

In those days to drink freely was almost a necessity in order to be thought a good fellow, and I was thought “a very good fellow,” for which proud distinction I had been content to destroy my intellect and lower myself below the unreasoning brutes. Thus I awoke in spirit life, with faculties so dulled and destroyed that I was unable to use them, and I lay for years in a dull torpor, without consciousness of anything; I had, in fact, lost years of spirit life, and had now to begin, so to speak, at the bottom of the ladder.

I had no idea how long this state of inactivity had lasted till, on questioning Patrick, I found it was now five years since my death and his. During that time he had been much about the atmosphere of earth, since all his interests were centred in the cause of his oppressed countrymen, and it was not till the final failure of that cause, and the ruin and death or exile of those taking part in it, that he had been able to free himself from the chains that seemed to bind him to the spot where all his interests were centred. During all this time, too, he had been haunted incessantly by the memory of his revengeful act in depriving my brother of life, and it was from the thoughts impressed upon him by the higher spirits, who were ever following him, unseen, that he at last saw his crime in its true light, and now sought to make all the atonement for it in his power.

At this time neither of us was aware of the presence of these unseen bright spirits, and we believed that it was our own self-inspired thoughts alone that had haunted us and prompted our remorse. We did not learn till long afterwards that our natural remorse was assisted to find the remedy for our sins by the promptings of the higher spirits, who ever, even in these dark spheres, are working unseen to aid such as are willing to listen to the thoughts they inspire. Like mortals on earth, we saw not these bright ones, and we seemed ever alone, save for the presence of such spirits as were like ourselves, or even worse.

It was a great relief to me to meet my friend Patrick, and to interchange our experiences. He was full of hopefulness, and at last inspired me with some of his energy, and made me see how much might still be done to raise ourselves and help to raise some of the miserable ones around us. I asked him, among other things, about my brother—whether in his visits to earth he had seen aught of him—and then it was, with tears of shame and remorse, that he told me how he had learned that my brother was the true author of our deaths—how he had planned it all, and betrayed us to the Government, and how he, Patrick Ryan, had revenged himself by killing him in his turn, and how bitterly he now repented of the mad passion that had possessed him, and had made the efforts already described to seek out my brother, and described his terror and flight at the sight of him.

This news was a great shock to me, and at first I seemed hardly able to believe it till I thought of many little things unnoticed by me at the time, but which I now recalled to memory, and they all confirmed the story of my brother's guilt. I was greatly overcome, and could not restrain my tears. It was so painful to think that my own brother could thus have planned my death, and then when I thought of his fate, my pity was awakened, and I longed to try in my turn to find and aid him; all anger for my own death having died out of my heart when I thought how terrible must be his state now. I asked Patrick if there was no way to help him, and if he had learned none. He replied by telling me what the bright spirit had told him, and said he feared that at present we could not possibly help him, but we might at least hope that, as soon as it was possible, a way might be shown for us to do so.

While we were thus speaking, the bright spirit who had shown himself to Patrick, appeared again, and bade us begin our work by trying to help those who were beside us in the same city, since we should thus gain knowledge and power to help my brother by-and-by. Saying thus, he gave me also a little bright starlike light, telling me that wherever it was carried the darkness would be dispelled, and hope and light be granted to all who sought for them in the right spirit. The bright spirit then vanished, and we set out together to begin our work in that dismal town.

I will not attempt to tell all our experiences, but merely give you a general idea of our work. Many people seemed so very intent upon the affairs of those around them, that they had no time to attend to their own, and as a consequence their homes looked very neglected and unkept. No flowers grew in that bleak soil; no clear light of day was ever seen there, but at most only a dim sort of twilight, and the air was heavy and stifling as it is before a thunderstorm on earth. Here and there a few people were making efforts to improve their homes and help their neighbours in many little ways, and it was to these spirits we were told to go first, since they were now capable of benefiting by being helped. None can be effectually helped till they prove willing to help themselves—for each one must for himself work out his own salvation. Others can merely direct and assist them in their efforts. Some spirits were too lazy and discontented with all idea of labour of any kind to do anything or take the least trouble to improve their condition; and they told us the road was much too hard, they could never climb it, they could never face all the difficulties and dangers, so we had to leave them till they should grow wiser and more energetic.

One spirit we saw sitting by the roadside, drawing round him with much dignity what seemed at first sight a magnificent mantle of silk and velvet, trimmed with handsome fur and with jewelled clasps, but on approaching him we saw it was faded and ragged, and the fur hung in moth-eaten patches, while the jewels were all sham, and gave a most tawdry appearance to the figure. The face looked haggard and worn, and the skin puffy and coarse, while the body was inflated and swollen, more like a man with dropsy than anything else I can liken it to. He informed us with an air of immense condescension and great consequence, that on earth he had been a duke.

and on our offering to help him he added that he had always been accustomed to give advice, and to arrange the affairs of other people, not to allow others to interfere with him. He had not been here long, he said, and he felt that there must be a mistake somewhere, as he considered that his life on earth entitled him to expect to be in a very different place. He seemed almost disposed to forget his dignity and talk to us, but suddenly remembering it again, he bid us good-day, very stiffly, and bowed with an air of great condescension, so we felt we had better leave him.

CHAPTER XVII.

Know, then, that in our long wanderings through the City of Unrest, we found men—and women, too—in every stage of apathy, misery, and despair. Some had been there so long that they had lost all hope of ever leaving it. They seemed to be doing over and over again as much as possible those things which they had enjoyed on earth, but which now never gave them the smallest satisfaction. To many of these we brought, as the spirit had told us, light and hope, and they too in their turn became messengers of hope to others, and thus the circle of workers for good ever widened.

After we had worked in the city for some time, the bright spirit came to us again, and said that now we should go together to places still darker—still more hopeless—for the strength we had gained would enable us to raise spirits whose crimes had been much greater, and whose sufferings were so intense, and their remorse so keen, that it was, indeed, no easy mission of love to give them light and hope. We accordingly now turned towards those dark caverns which Patrick had described to me, and which he had seen on his way to the City of Unrest.

The thick, heavy darkness and the oppressive nature of the atmosphere are beyond my power to describe. I can only liken it to a coal mine full of choke-damp and foul gas. But the unhappy spirits, who seemed to be chained there in darkness and misery, are not so conscious of the oppressiveness

of the atmosphere as those who belong to spheres above them, and we were able to make ourselves visible to these unhappy ones in a way that higher and brighter spirits than ourselves could not do.

These caverns were of vast extent; far beyond our power to penetrate. The roof was high in some parts and very low in others, so that some of the poor spirits seemed to be living in a sort of cell or tunnel. I was again and again reminded of the resemblance to a coal mine, as numerous little tunnels and passages seemed to branch out in all directions through the walls of the larger caverns. Great fungi grew up all round, and long, slimy sort of creepers, that were more like the arms of the octopus, or those sea plants that are half fish, half plant, hung from the roof. The floor was in patches of hard dry rock and deep black mud, that seemed to be oozing through the walls and the roof, too, in all directions. There was a feeling of intense cold and dampness that made us shiver.

Our lamps dispelled the intensity of the darkness round us, and caused many of the poor, unhappy spirits to raise themselves from the floor, and the corners where they were crouching, and come towards us. Others seemed too hopeless even to move. First to one, then to another did we go, explaining our object in visiting their dwellings, and striving to give to all some sense of hope and light; striving to make them feel that it rested with themselves to stay on in this dark and horrible place, or to try, by good works and earnest efforts, to raise themselves—by slow degrees it is true—but yet to raise themselves gradually to the brighter spheres of light and hope. We told them how we ourselves were but workers from the next sphere above them, and inspired them to try to help others around them, and thus draw them also from this dark sphere. So hard did we labour, and so much did we find to do, that we never thought how long we thus worked.

In our anxiety to help these suffering ones, we even forgot our desire to advance ourselves into the brighter spheres, and we remained working in these gloomy caverns for over a year, happy to think that at last we were doing good to someone, and that now our lives were really useful. At times we would come across others who bore little lamps like our own, and who belonged to the same band of workers, but more often we

worked in places where the light of hope had never yet come to the unhappy ones imprisoned there, and, as we worked, there came to us both a sense of great peace and rest. Even in that dark place there seemed to be light around us both; a light that the unhappy ones for whom we laboured could not see, but which was yet visible to ourselves, and we also saw our own dark grey robes, with which we had at first been clothed, change for a lighter shade, and our forms also grow lighter.

At last, when we had thus worked for upwards of two years, ever widening the circle of our efforts, we were surprised on awaking from one of our periods of rest and sleep to find that we were no longer in the dark cavern. All had changed around us, and where all had been darkness, only relieved by the light which surrounded ourselves, all was now light and brightness. We were in a little cottage, and though small, it was picturesque. The walls seemed transparent, and made of some light material, while flowers and creeping plants festooned them, and a soft, warm air floated in through the windows. Beyond lay a beautiful country—the most beautiful possible it seemed to my eyes, after the darkness and barrenness of the unhappy land we had left.

Since then I have seen lands even more beautiful, and have visited spheres more exalted and more perfect in every way. But this land was so like earth, and so welcome to my weary eyes, that no country can ever give me a more exquisite joy than I felt when I opened my eyes once more on a scene of light and beauty; when I knew I had indeed gained that land of hope of which I had so often dreamed. I turned to look for Patrick Ryan, and found him standing smiling by my side. He had wakened sooner than I, and had already been out to inspect this new country; and now several friends, whom I had known on earth, came also to welcome me; and after them came others, whom we had met and assisted in the dark spheres, some of whom had already reached this bright land.

Thus time passed rapidly, and I had so much to see and learn, so many friends to greet, that for a time I forgot the unhappy ones I had left in the dark spheres. But only for a time did we forget them, and on our enquiring about them we were told that we could still return and help them, though in a different way. And now we could always return at

will to our homes in this brighter sphere ; we could only go as visitors to those dark places, not any more as dwellers.

Patrick would no longer work with me either, because his path and mine must now separate for a time, though we should still meet in the bright land where we dwelt. Patrick's house was near mine. He was living with his father and mother, who had passed into spirit life while he was quite young ; and as they had always been tenderly attached to him, he would live with them, while I was to live in one of the large buildings belonging to the Brothers of Hope, where many spirits, who like myself were anxious to learn, and work while we were learning, lived much as students do in your colleges on earth.

I was now quite changed from my former appearance. In leaving the dark spheres I had left my heavy, dark body behind me, and I now appeared much as I had been on earth at the age of twenty-five, only that the spirit body possessed a brightness and perfection unknown on earth. Patrick, too, was changed in a similar way, but he, being of a graver firmer character, was older in appearance than I. He looked about thirty-five to forty, and presented the appearance of a man in the prime of his intellectual and bodily vigour.

The building that now became my home was more like a palace than a college, and was built of a beautiful white stone like marble, but not so heavy. It had green and white striped awnings at the windows to make a shade for those who might desire it, though there was no sun to be shut out, as on earth, the light being beautifully clear and soft, with a pleasant sense of warmth and brightness over everything. There were flowers everywhere, and the college was surrounded by beautiful grounds, and approached by terraces, from which a lovely view of the country could be seen. Here I found many new friends, and here I lived in harmony and happiness for more years than I can tell, since I took no account of time as you measure it on earth. And from this college of learning and hope I passed into the sphere above, where I now dwell, with a chosen companion whom I met there, and who now makes my life complete indeed.

Let it not be supposed that during all these happy years I had forgotten my poor brother, or was indifferent to his fate. Ah ! no ; many and many a time I thought of him, and asked to be permitted to help him. Yet the answer ever

came, "Not yet, the time is not yet"; and from my own knowledge I had learned that none can be aided till they are ready to receive the help offered to them. Twice, however, I went to earth, at intervals of years, to the old house that had become his prison, and on each occasion he fled from me in terror and dislike, and I returned sorrowfully to my home in the spirit land, to wait till the bright spirits should tell me the time had come at last to release him.

At last, when I had been over eighty years in spirit life, the message came—"Go now to earth and help your brother, the time has come." In obedience to this summons I returned to earth, and found my brother in the old house where I had left him, a house that was now rapidly falling into decay. And now, too, I saw much that had before been hid from me. I saw that the house was full of spirits, darker, some of them, even than my poor brother, while one dark spirit in particular, whom I saw, seemed as a leader amongst them. He was to my eyes most repulsive-looking, for all his thoughts and evil plans were written in the dark aura that surrounded him. I found I could read all his thoughts, all his life, in a way I could not have done when I worked among the dark spirits in the lower spheres. He was indeed a powerful spirit of evil—one who might have appeared to mortals, could they have beheld him, as the King of Evil they picture to themselves, and yet all the power he exercised could only be wielded over those who gave the rein to their evil passions, and encouraged themselves in selfishness and wrongdoing; those who would welcome any aid, however unscrupulous and bad, that would assist them to gain their ends. Over the actually good and true, whose lives were governed by a sense of right and duty, he had no power; and when the influences of good and bright spirits of a high order were opposed to him, he could but flee before them in wrath and powerful spite.

This evil spirit, and the strongest and most evil of those who were around him, exercised over my brother a sort of terrorism, using him almost as a slave, to execute their evil purposes against others. All the lowest vices of petty tyrants were displayed by these evil and unhappy spirits, and they spent their time in tormenting one another, and combining together to maltreat first one and then another of their unlucky associates. Had they been consistent in their schemes, and

united systematically in pursuit of some common object, they would indeed have constituted an actual and ever present danger to mortals as well as to spirits; but except for a short time, they seemed unable to act in unison. They invariably quarrelled amongst themselves. Each would want to be the leader, and when assigned a subordinate place, would direct all his energy to spoil the whole plan rather than let another succeed. Yet, even over this disorderly crew, the powerful spirit whom I saw had contrived to gain such an ascendancy, that for a time he would bend all their wills to his own, and try hard to carry out some plan for mischief, only to be thwarted by the power of the unseen bright spirits who kept a check upon his capacity to do harm, and, unknown to him, brought stronger influences to aid those who were themselves anxious to resist his evil suggestions.

To draw a strictly realistic description of the house thus haunted, and of the spirits who dwelt there, would be impossible, and would probably do more harm than good; but I wish to give you some slight conception of the condition in which we found my brother, and of his surroundings. The haunting spirits repeated in this house, as far as lay in their power, all those acts of their earthly lives that had once made their pleasure, but had now become a terrible penance. They were unable to derive any enjoyment from their sinful appetites, and they avenged their disappointment on their unhappy companions in misery, making to themselves and to each other a worse hell of baffled passions and tormenting remorse than words can paint.

From this state of misery there was for most of them but small prospect of escape, since they were in a manner chained by their own evil actions to this house, which held all their thoughts and desires, and beyond which very few of them seemed able or even anxious to raise themselves. None were more hopelessly chained, to all appearance, than my poor brother, since neither in his life nor in his death was he conscious of other or higher thoughts than this house contained. Now and then some of the more strong-willed spirits would by force of will attach themselves to some mortal with whom they came in contact, and thus be taken among fresh scenes and influences, sometimes to their own benefit, as it opened up to them new opportunities of redeeming their past lives, but more frequently to the great injury of the un-

lucky mortal, for the wretched and evil spirit would drag him down to its own level, and inspire him with its own evil thoughts. As the house came to be more and more abandoned to the "ghosts," as they are called by you on earth, the chances of their leaving their prison-house would become fewer and fewer, and the spirits become more completely imprisoned in the house they made uninhabitable by their presence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When men on earth laugh, as they do in their foolishness, at stories of ghosts and hauntings, and scoff at the fear they inspire, they little know that it is a wise provision for the safety of mortals which causes that vague feeling of uneasiness and dread often felt in these haunted houses at the presence of these unseen visitants from another world. The more sensitive the person visiting such places, the stronger is this feeling of repugnance and fear, and did men regard it in its true light they would welcome it as a warning voice from guarding and protecting spirits, who seek to show the danger of meddling with unseen powers of whose strength they are quite ignorant.

It is the fashion now for men to sneer at the tales of ancient magic, and what they call the "black art," but could they for one moment lift the veil that hides such mysteries from their imperfect vision, they would shrink back appalled at the dangers through which they pass hourly, preserved only by that power of good over evil which ever spreads as a shield around the earthly path, a shield that can only be cast aside by mortals themselves in the pride of their own ignorance.

Into this hell on the earth plane, whose complete horrors I am compelled to keep from mortal eyes, since I may not yet lift the veil which in mercy hides these horrors from the dwellers on earth, came I in search of my unhappy brother, and there unseen by him did I labour to aid and strengthen him in his endeavour to throw off the yoke that so long had

enslaved him. Unknown to himself and his companions in misery, I laboured hard to instil into his mind purer and nobler thoughts, and to teach him, even as one would teach a child (for in the darkness and sorrow of his spirit life he had grown humble at last as a little child), those simple lessons of goodness and truth that would help his higher faculties to grow and expand at last after their long death-like sleep, even as the petals of a flower open one by one to the light and warmth of the sun.

To the dark spirits of that dark spot I was invisible, save when I desired to show myself to them for a moment, and thus, unknown to all, I worked and waited till the soul of my brother should cast off its chains, and seek for that hard path that could lead him from his darkness and the night of his prison-house. I say the night, for to those dark spirits it was ever night; the bright sun you behold rise day by day was invisible to them, as were all pure and bright things. The darkness of their spirits shadowed all around them, and made a gloom as of night wherever they dwelt.

Thus had I worked for over three of your earth years, when the old house was visited by two young men. They came, prompted by curiosity and a foolish idea that they, alone and unaided, would discover the mystery of the haunted house, and they proceeded in the usual blind, self-confident fashion followed by most mortals who investigate a new subject. What they experienced you already know, but you do not know that when they left the house so hurriedly it was by the promptings of myself and my brother. Their doing so saved them from a great danger, since the powerful evil spirit of whom I spoke had resolved that their lives should pay the penalty of their intrusion upon his domain.

Though baffled by their sudden departure, and rendered powerless to follow them at once by the strong force of brighter spirits which I and Patrick Ryan (who had now joined me in helping my brother) had drawn round us, he yet, by the force of his strong will, kept up a sort of rapport between himself and the taller of the two young men, and when opportunity offered later on he contrived to attach himself almost constantly to him, and to influence him more and more. At last he established such complete control over him that he almost murdered his friend, besides committing many other evil actions. How much evil might have been done is un-

known, since this young man had, latent in his nature, many of those defects and weaknesses of character and principle that give power to strong and evil spirits such as Ben Holdfast to influence them.

It now became my brother's mission to counteract the plans of Ben Holdfast and his attendant spirits, and he, strengthened (unknown to himself) by my influence, and that of Patrick Ryan and others, saved this young man from many evil and foolish acts, by instilling into his mind warnings, and by haunting him with mental pictures of what his evil passions would bring upon him. These warnings and provisions he called "bad dreams" and did his best to disregard, yet they so far influenced and impressed him that he paused and turned back from his path many times. More than to thus warn him we could not do for him, since all are free agents, and can choose their own paths.

It was through being prompted by the evil spirit of Ben that he took his journey to Ireland, and returned once more to the neighbourhood of the Haunted House; an act that placed him so completely in the power of the spirits dwelling in it, that we were almost unable to interfere or help him in any way. His first plan was to wait in the old house for his former friend and the girl they both loved, and murder the pair; but when my brother, by appearing to you and warning you to go away, baffled him, Old Ben caused his almost unconscious agent to run swiftly down to the lake by a short cut from the back of the house, and intercept you there. In the shadow of this house the power of Old Ben was so strong that all we could do was to put as much distance as we could between the old house and the intended victims, and we hoped that the boat might reach the shore before the spirits' control was sufficient to produce a fatal result. But this could not be managed with perfect success, and the evil ones nearly triumphed.

The rest is already known to you, and I have only to add that it was by our influence the circle was held, which has enabled my brother at last to break his chains, and to leave the house that was so long his prison. He has now begun to climb slowly the path which will lead him at last to a brighter sphere, and finally to the one in which I dwell.

Receive, then, the thanks of those you have aided, and believe that their help will ever be at your service in return

for all you have done for them. And now in the name of us all, I say, adieu! May every blessing attend you and all who have assisted you in your work of love.

* * * * *

CONCLUSION.

On my return to London I at once called on Madame Bonnell and readily obtained her consent to my marriage with her niece. She seemed to feel she would have liked something richer and with a more assured position than I could offer Aimée, but she consoled herself by thinking that after all our attachment was quite a romantic one, and Aimée was so peculiar in some ways that, perhaps, I might suit her very well after all.

As I was now getting on well and had a fair income, I persuaded Aimée to consent to an early marriage, and at the end of July we were duly married from Madame Bonnell's house, the details of the ceremony affording that lady much occupation and satisfaction, and then I took my wife abroad for a tour through Italy and France.

Aimée had written to her brother in India to tell him of our engagement, and also about the strange events at Ben's Hollow, and suggesting that it might be as well to either pull or burn down the old house, since it was of no use and no one could live in it; and naturally he wrote her a long letter from the "sensible nineteenth century"—practical, common-sense view—as he called it, saying that if we were both mad he was not, and would never consent to destroy a piece of old family property like that. He intended to return from India by-and-by, and should certainly try and live in the house himself. As to her marriage with me, not having seen me he could form no opinion, and must leave that to Madame Bonnell; if she was satisfied he would be pleased to welcome me as a brother, but he hoped I should show more common sense in the affairs of life than was indicated by attending such foolish things as spirit circles and taking wild fancies about haunted houses. This letter amused us both, and Aimée wrote again to her brother, sending him the last criticisms on my pictures in the exhibition to show him that I could do something else besides interviewing ghosts, and so the discussion about the house ended.

We returned from our trip abroad, after spending six delightful weeks, and found the (to us) welcome news awaiting us—that Ben's Hollow had been mysteriously burned down, no one knew how, but it was supposed that some tramps, strangers to the place, had been trying to sleep in an outhouse and set fire to it by smoking, and that the fire had spread to the house itself, and being far from other houses and all the country people afraid to go near the place it had been completely destroyed, and only the outer walls left standing, more dreary-looking than ever.

Thus ended the Haunted House of Ben's Hollow.

Old Spearman's Ghost.

In January, 1885, I was engaged to survey some land offered for sale near Fort Myers and the Everglades, in South Florida; and I need hardly say that in carrying out such a commonplace piece of business it never entered my thoughts that I would meet with any startling adventures, yet I then met with the strangest experience of my life. I found that part of the State sparsely settled and travelling difficult. Railways there were none. A small steamer left Tampa twice a week for Key West, touching in at the rising settlements along the Gulf Coast. There was the alternative of a rickety, ramshackle vehicle, a sort of half buggy, half waggon, which went across the country to Pine Level with the mails, and sometimes carried a stray traveller. Neither of these conveyances suited me, so I bought a stout, fairly well-bred horse, and rode leisurely forward towards my destination.

One morning I started early in order to reach a small town on the Manatee River before sunset, but I must somehow have miscalculated, for late in the afternoon I found myself still in the woods and no indication of any town. January is one of the most agreeable months for travelling in South Florida, but there is hardly any twilight; the sun seems to set in a hurry, and leave a traveller in darkness with but little warning. I was now riding along the river bank, where the track, which could hardly be called a road, skirted the edge of the woods, and as the sun was now very nearly setting, I hurried my horse up, and looked anxiously for any lights shining through the trees, or any other sign of the town, or at least some human habitation.

Just as the last rays of sunlight were fading from the horizon and my hopes dying out with them, a sharp turn of the road suddenly brought me in full view of a large square-built house standing on a grassy knoll, where the forest trees had been cleared away for some distance, and the ground at the back of the house sloped down to the river. My first feeling was one of relief and pleasure, but my next glance at the building damped my hopes considerably. It looked dark and deserted, and as I drew nearer, the broken fences, neglected garden,

and empty window frames, told their own terrible story without words of abandonment and desolation.

The ruined homestead looked so thoroughly uninhabitable that my first impulse was to pass it without stopping. Still, I reflected, that might be unwise. Surely anything would be better than sleeping out in the woods, or wandering on in the darkness, with the chance of encountering opossums, wild pigs, or rattlesnakes, etc. It might be as well to look at the house before rejecting such shelter as it could offer. The road was an ill-defined track, with the river as a sort of guide, but there were so many "creeks" straggling out of the stream, and so many water courses straggling into it that I might find myself brought to a standstill by the impossibility, or at least great danger, of crossing them in the dark. I therefore dismounted, "hitched" my horse by the bridle to a large branch of a tree, and proceeded to explore the house.

It must have been the abode of someone of considerable importance. It was not only large but it was built of concrete and brick—very unusual and expensive materials where wood cost nothing and was almost invariably used. It was now very ruinous. The floors were almost completely rotted away, and full of holes, and but for a few sound planks laid down as a sort of pathway from room to room, it would have been impossible to explore it at all. The roof was very dilapidated, and the last gleams of daylight were shining through it in innumerable places—altogether a refuge only to be resorted to in the last extremity.

I turned to go out again, when I was startled by the sudden rush down the broken staircase of some large dark object. At first I thought it might be some wild forest animal which had made the place its lair. Panthers, even, are not at all uncommon in these woods, and I hastened to draw out my revolver and place myself on the defensive. As I did so the "something" seemed to gather itself up and stand erect within a few feet of where I stood. To my surprise it seemed to be a man carrying a strange phosphorescent bluish-looking ball of light in his hand. I looked hard at this apparition, but he seemed not to see me, and took no notice of my presence. He glided rather than walked, past where I stood aghast, through the hall into one room after another—anxiously examining the fastenings of the windows and shaking the old worm-eaten shutters, all the time sighing and grumbling and muttering to

himself. I had plenty of time to examine him closely, and the strange light he held made him distinctly visible in the surrounding darkness.

A strange figure indeed! dressed apparently in the fashion of half a century ago, but the clothes all hanging about him in rags, and fluttering as though they would drop off from age and constant use. The figure appeared that of a tall man, but so hunched together that it was almost like one deformed. The face I did not see till on turning rather suddenly at one corner of the room, he stopped and faced me, seemingly becoming then for the first time aware of my presence. Oh! what an evil, horrible, unhappy-looking face! It made me quite shudder as the hollow-socketed, restless eyes met mine, and seemed to pierce through me with their baleful, burning gaze. Involuntarily I tried to step back towards the door, with the idea of escaping. But I could not move while those horrid eyes fixed mine. Vainly did I try to speak, meaning to explain how I had come there; but suddenly the "thing" uttered a wild yell, threw up its arms, and to my horror disappeared backwards right through the solid wall. That same instant, as it seemed, my poor horse gave a loud shriek of terror and trampled violently with his hoofs, as though trying desperately to break loose and escape. Released from the spell cast upon me, I rushed from the house and hurried to his assistance. I found him in a sort of fit, sitting on his haunches as far from the tree as his bridle would allow; his neck stretched stiffly out, his mouth open, with blood and foam frothing over the teeth, and his eyes starting from his head in the extremity of his terror. As I reached him he gave a last convulsive shudder, rolled over, and fell heavily to the ground—dead; as I found to my sorrow and surprise. All attempts to revive him with the aid of my whiskey flask, dashing water over him, etc., proved ineffectual, and at last I was compelled to leave him where he lay.

Taking off the saddle, bridle, and small valise, I set wearily forth on foot to find my way onward as best I could. After plodding along for a little more than a mile, following the course of the river, I was fortunate enough to reach the settlement, and made my way to the small hotel, where I secured a bed and ordered supper. A dozen or so of "citizens" were gathered in the bar room, and while supper was being prepared I related my adventure as the strangest and most incompre-

hensible I had ever met with. What especially struck me about it was, I said, that I could not conceive what produced in my horse such a paroxysm of terror as to kill him.

During my narrative I saw my auditors exchanging curious and meaning glances, and on its conclusion they all turned as though by one consent to a very, very aged weather-beaten, tall man, whom they addressed as "Old Filey." "There," they said, "sits the very best man on the whole continent to give you an answer."

I stood drinks round at once, and the venerable "Old Filey" warmed into life, his dull, glassy eyes brightened, he threw his head back, and broke out in a hollow, cavernous voice.

"I reckon stranger as your beast saw Old Spearman."

"Old Spearman," I cried; "who was he?"

With a glance full of sorrowing pity he looked round the room, as if asking what could be done with ignorance so deplorable. His looks were answered by a unanimous call for his wonderful story of Eagle Heart's Love and the death of Sadie. After being primed with another "liquor up," and making as many difficulties as if he had been a young lady asked to sing, the ancient at last narrated the history of the ruined house with an abundance of expletives and raciness of style that I cannot reproduce, but the substance of which is the following:—

AN INDIAN LOVE STORY.

Eagle Heart's Love.

A few years before the last war between the Seminole Indians and the United States a wealthy gentleman named Willmore came from Charleston to settle in South Florida, and built a large mansion on the Manatee River. Here he resided with his wife and only child—a little girl. He owned a large number of slaves and a great deal of land, and grew cotton, sugar cane, oranges, etc. His overseer and manager was a "Down-East" Yankee, named Spearman, who, according to the opinion of the neighbourhood, was a great deal harder to the negroes and all under him than any Southern man bred and born could have been, whatever fine talk Northern folks might choose to indulge in.

This Spearman was a crafty, designing man who kept a

smooth face and fair manner to his employer, and contrived to make himself so necessary that he was entirely trusted by Mr. Willmore, who even went so far as to appoint him guardian of the little girl jointly with Mrs. Willmore.

At that time the Seminoles were on fairly friendly terms with the whites, and Mr. Spearman, it was more than hinted, added considerably to his own private store by trading with them; receiving from them alligator skins and teeth, the plumage of beautiful birds, and bear and panther skins, in exchange for flour, corn, sugar, and other useful goods, which were popularly supposed to come from the storehouses of Mr. Willmore without the knowledge of that gentleman.

Spearman was also said to engage in the illicit manufacture and sale of spirits, which he distilled at a secret work he had erected in the swampy lands near the plantation, and which he owned jointly with a couple of half-castes of the most disreputable character. These spirits were also, it was said, exchanged with the Indians. All this, however, was only whispered darkly, as no one liked to say it openly, Spearman being a dangerous man to offend; so Mr. Willmore, a lazy, easy-going man, heard none of these rumours, and went on trusting his overseer more and more till, at last, the whole management of the property drifted into his hands.

There were a good many Indians in Florida at that time, and down on the "Miaka" (as the great prairie land of Florida is called) the Indian settlement was a very considerable one.

The Indians, or rather Seminoles, were then and are even now regarded by the white settlers as a very different race from the "Niggers." No one would think of trusting a negro, or believing what he said, but it was a common custom to trust an Indian with a barrel of flour, or some such thing, upon his simple promise to pay for it, say, in the autumn, and as sure as the time came round, the Indian would come bringing the skins or whatever else he had promised.

These Seminoles were a very handsome race, and considered among the finest specimens of Aborigines to be found on the continent. They used, at that time, to mix a good deal with the whites, and Mr. Willmore took a great interest in them, especially in one lad, the son of a Chief, who used to come to the house with furs, feathers, and curious things made by his tribe.

Mr. Willmore's little girl Sadie got into the way of playing

with this Indian lad, and showing him how to do things, such as reading and writing his name and hers, and drawing pictures, and he, in his turn, would show her how to shoot with his bow and arrows, and would bring her as presents some of the pretty things the Indians made of beads and feathers. He was only three years older than Sadie Willmore, and she, poor child, not having any brothers or sisters, was very pleased to find a playmate.

This sort of thing went on till Sadie was nearly fifteen and the Indian lad, whose name was Eagle Heart, was about eighteen. Mrs. Willmore began to think it was then time her daughter left off playing with Indians and nigger children and learned to be more of a young lady, so she got a lady from the north, a cousin of Mr. Spearman (of course, recommended by him), to come as governess to Sadie, and it was only now and then she could see her Indian friend.

It so happened that one day soon after the arrival of Miss Bell, the governess, Mrs. Willmore and Sadie were sitting in the verandah when Eagle Heart came as usual with a present for Sadie of some bright plumaged birds he had shot and made into a fan for her. He approached with the noiseless step of his race, intending to give her a surprise, and as he drew near he heard Mrs. Willmore saying, "Yes, I daresay, Sadie, you don't like Miss Bell and her lessons, and would rather be out playing with Eagle Heart, but that must be at an end now. It was all very well while you were a child to spend your time playing with an ignorant savage, but now that you are growing up it is time to end all that. When you come to visit your aunts in Charleston by-and-bye, you will be ashamed to have learned nothing but what a half civilised Indian can teach you."

Then Sadie began to cry and said, "Eagle Heart is my friend, and I can never, never be ashamed of him, and I believe what he knows is just as useful as what they learn in towns."

"Just as useful, Sadie, in the woods, maybe, but not much use in the towns, and in two years, when you are old enough to have a season in the city, who knows but that you may find some nice young man much more suitable to make a friend of than this Indian? So don't be foolish, child; read your books, and study your music, and leave Eagle Heart to find companions among his own people."





"But, mother," persisted Sadie, whose experience of life was limited to the secluded spot where they lived, and who could not understand why her dusky friend should be despised by anyone; "why can't Eagle Heart learn what the town folks learn? Why should he be called a savage? He is very good and kind and clever, and no one can be a truer friend than he is."

"Tut, Sadie; you are a child, and talk like one. Wait till you are older—wait till you have had a season in Charleston, and then you will know why. There, now, is your father coming in to tea, so let us go in and talk no more nonsense about that young savage, who is quite fit to scalp and murder us all some night if we offend him."

Eagle Heart waited to hear no more, but stole away as silently as he had come—stole away into the woods, where there was no eye to see him, and then gave way to all the passionate anger and sorrow that filled his heart. Never till then had he realised that he might be shown to Sadie's eyes as an untaught savage. He had been so proud of the fame he had gained for skill and daring amongst his own people that the knowledge of the pale-faces had seemed worthless in comparison. But now—now—he was seized with a desire to learn all that these haughty, pale-faced people knew, that in Sadie's eyes he might appear in no way inferior to any of her people. For, alas! poor Eagle Heart had learned that one lesson that all youths and maidens learn without a teacher—he had learned to love his child companion with all the passionate ardour of his age and race.

As for Sadie—child as she was—she had grown so to look and to watch for the coming of her Indian, that even in her childish heart the first seeds of love were sown, and when day after day passed and Eagle Heart came no more she felt a great blank—a great sense of desolation and loss—as though some loved one were dead. Then she grew sad and pale and listless, till one day an old Indian squaw came up to the house to trade with Mr. Spearman. When Sadie saw her she asked eagerly why it was that Eagle Heart came no more to see his friend, and the Indian woman told her that Eagle Heart had gone, no one knew whither, but he had sent an amulet of beads to his dear pale-face friend, and bid the squaw tell her that after many moons had passed he would come again, and she would see that her Indian friend had not forgotten her,

though he had left her for a time. Then Sadie brightened up somewhat, and always looked for Eagle Heart's return; but month after month passed till nearly two years were gone; still Eagle Heart never came.

Long years after the neighbourhood heard that Eagle Heart had gone to the Missionary Station at Tampa, and asked the missionaries to teach him all they knew. So hard did he study that before the two years were over he had learned reading, writing, and many other useful things that appeared to the Indian quite wonderful knowledge. Then he returned to his own people to the great surprise and joy of all the tribe, but all joy and pride fled from his heart at the first news he heard of Sadie. She was said to be betrothed, of all people to no other than Spearman, the crafty, middle-aged overseer. Mr. Willmore and his wife were both dead. There had been a terrible outbreak of yellow fever a few months before, brought, it was supposed, from Key West by some newly-arrived negroes. Mr. Willmore had bought there, and half of the old slaves were dead, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Willmore. Under Mr. Willmore's will Spearman was sole guardian to Sadie, and sole executor, so that he and his cousin, Miss Bell, had things all their own way up at the big house. It was said that poor Sadie was so guarded and watched by them that no one could ever get a chance of seeing her alone, and she had been either persuaded or forced into a promise to marry this wretch whom she detested.

When Eagle Heart heard this he rose at once and left the wigwam of his father, taking with him his bow and arrows, his tomahawk, and his long hunting-knife. He went straight to Sadie's home, and waited and watched till night came and the darkness enabled him to steal up to it silently and unperceived. He had written a letter of which he felt very proud, and he placed within it (what was to him his most treasured possession) a little silk purse which Sadie had made for him long before. This he enclosed in case Sadie should not be able to recognise the letter—the wonderful letter—as his handiwork.

As soon as all was quiet and the household asleep, the Indian climbed up one of the posts of the verandah and crept softly along the top to the window of the room where he knew of old Sadie slept. The window was open, but there was a sash frame of mosquito gauze, such as is used in most wealthy

planters' houses, to keep out insects. This Eagle Heart cautiously opened, and stepping softly into the room crept to the bed-side, and placed his letter in the hand of the sleeping girl. Then he lifted one of the long tresses of her hair to his lips and kissed it tenderly, stole from the room as silently as he had entered, and returned into the woods once more.

At earliest dawn he renewed his watch over the house, keeping carefully within the shelter of the woods, and about noon he was rewarded by the arrival of a little negro girl with a letter from Sadie. Her joy at hearing from her old friend was too great for words. She had wept as she read his beautiful letter, and at the thought of such unexpected aid and deliverance, for she knew that he, above all others, could best help and save her. She was, she said, almost a prisoner in the house; watched always by Miss Bell, or by Spearman himself, who had terrified her into promising to marry him. She had written to some of her relations, but felt sure the letters had all been intercepted, for no answer ever came to them. The little messenger she sent was faithful, and would bring her any letter or message Eagle Heart might send; and then Sadie finished with many loving words to her Indian friend himself. To this letter Eagle Heart answered in only a few words, bidding her look for him that night when all the house was quiet, and he would come and help her to escape, and would take her to his own tribe for shelter and protection till her other friends could be found.

Of his love he did not speak. When she was free and safe would be time enough for that. He was too proud to seem to take advantage of her helplessness to ask for her love as a recompense for his help. Of her own free will only should she give him the love he sought.

That night Eagle Heart, accompanied by a friendly "brave," and leading a swift horse for Sadie, rode up to the thick "Hammock" wood near the plantation, and leaving his friend to wait with the horses, made his way up to the house and to Sadie's room as on the night before.

All went well as far as Sadie's escape from her room was concerned. The Indian climbed on to the roof of the verandah, and lowered Sadie carefully to the ground by means of a buffalo-hide rope he had brought with him. He then began to descend himself, and had almost reached the ground when one of the lower windows was suddenly opened, and

Spearman himself appeared, pistol in hand. He was always on the alert, for he had too many enemies around not to dread some sudden secret attack. This night he was lying awake when his quick ear caught the slight rustle of Sadie's dress as the Indian lowered her to the ground. Quick as thought he recognised his intended bride and the Indian, Eagle Heart, and before the Indian reached the ground Spearman had levelled his pistol at him and fired. But rapid as he was, Sadie in her love was even quicker. Feeling rather than seeing his intention, she threw herself with a scream upon Eagle Heart's breast to protect and save him, and Spearman's bullet struck her heart. With scarce a sigh she sank dead at the feet of the lover who had proved so powerless to save her, and as Eagle Heart, stunned and stupefied by the awfulness of the catastrophe, knelt over her imploring her to look at him—to speak to him but one word ere she died, Spearman drew his long bowie-knife and stabbed him twice in the back, killing him almost as suddenly as his bullet had killed the unfortunate Sadie.

Thus died the brave Eagle Heart, the pride and hope of his tribe. But not unavenged.

The shot, and Sadie's despairing scream, not only aroused the sleeping household, but brought to the spot Eagle Heart's Indian comrade. He, after the manner of his race, stayed that night but to learn that his friend was truly dead and to carry off the body, but this outward calmness was only assumed that his vengeance might be the more complete. A few nights later he returned, accompanied by all the braves of his tribe. Spearman was by no means unprepared. He well knew that his cowardly murder of Eagle Heart had drawn upon him the tribe's bitterest hostility, and by lavish promises for the future and an unlimited profusion of drink in the present, he had rallied round him a number of half-caste, disreputable whites—for his negroes, he knew, would be only too glad to take the opportunity of a fight for escaping. These whites and Spearman offered a desperate resistance, but the Indians soon overpowered them, captured and sacked the house, killed Spearman, and mutilated his corpse with the utmost ferocity. They were not so vindictive against the other whites, some of whom succeeded in escaping, while Miss Bell, who had fled to the woods at the first sign of the Indians' approach, disappeared from the country, and was seen no more.

After this massacre the ruins stood desolate and deserted. They had the name of being haunted by the malignant spirit of Spearman, and though a few tourists or travellers occasionally climbed to the top to enjoy the lovely panorama of wood and water to be seen from the cupola on the roof, no one belonging to the neighbourhood ever ventured there at night or alone.

"Old Filey" wound up by saying: "Yes, stranger, you may well wonder how I know this so well. I was there, stranger, that's how I know—there when old Spearman was killed, and glad I was to escape with all my hair on. I was a spry lad then, stranger, and always ready to fight, especially Injuns, but we were licked catawampous, and served Spearman right, for if ever anyone deserved to be killed first and accursed after, it was that old Spearman, who was never up to any good when he was on earth, and doesn't seem up to any now, wherever he has gone."

"Old Filey" ceased. He had evidently excelled himself. His oft-told tale seemed to possess an unfading interest, and the sympathising audience loudly expressed their applause. As for me, I had passed through such an experience as I never can forget, and it required no argument to convince me that I, at least, had "seen old Spearman." As for my poor horse, when I thought of the awful apparition that had so frozen me with horror as to keep me spell-bound and paralysed till it vanished, I ceased to wonder at its convulsions and death.

I know that many refuse to believe that animals can be conscious of ghosts, but I would refer them to the numerous instances of such events in the literature of every country in all ages, including, with all reverence, the Scriptures themselves. For myself, I feel convinced that "Old Filey" was right and that my faithful fellow traveller also had "seen old Spearman"—not "up to any good."

Stout Wooer & the Haunted Room.

She was young, she was likewise pretty, and a brunette of the small-featured type that seems particularly irresistible to most men. She wore a riding habit and a neat little felt hat.

Her companion was a good-looking young man of about five or six and twenty, dressed in the scarlet coat and riding breeches that proclaimed him a follower of Nimrod, while the presence of a man's hunting-crop upon the table of the little summer-house where they sat showed what their recent occupation had been. It was Christmas-time, but the weather was rather mild for the season, and though there was a cold wind there were no signs of frost or snow.

"He's an abominable old wretch, and I think it just horrid of papa to dare to suggest that I ought to 'marry him!'" cried the girl.

"Simply shameful," agreed the young man, "and the worst of it all is that, while your father favours this old boy with the money bags, it is no use for a poor devil like myself asking his consent to our engagement, Kitty. Indeed, in any case, I would be afraid to tell him about it till I have some better prospect to offer you, till I could say I had something like a fair income, and now this Mr. Bampton turning up with his proposal and offering to settle so much money upon you, will floor my chances entirely. I only wish there was some way of getting rid of the old porpoise."

"Oh, Charlie!" sighed Kitty, "I wish there was. I wish I might run away before he arrives. Papa will be so angry if I refuse Mr. Bampton after all he told me about our needing money so badly. And yet I will not marry the wretch; I will die first." And Miss Kitty put on an expression worthy of an early Christian martyr at the stake.

"Marry him!" almost shouted her youthful adorer, "Marry him! Why, I will see him hanged first; I'll polish him off with my own hands if needful."

"Oh, don't talk like that," cried Kitty, with a little scream,

"you would never do anything so horrid as to kill anyone, would you?"

"Ah! I don't know. I can't say what I might do if I heard that you had accepted him." And Charlie clutched his whip with an expression that meant unutterable things for the unlucky Bampton; while Kitty got out a diminutive handkerchief and dabbed her eyes vehemently with it. Suddenly she looked up with a mischievous smile. "Oh, Charlie!" she cried, "I have it; I know what will send him away. Let's put him to sleep in the Haunted Room, and refuse to let him out till he promises to tell papa he won't marry me."

"Haunted Room!" retorted Charlie, with a sniff of disdain, "Poof! He would go to sleep and snore, that's all, great elephant that he is."

"No, he wouldn't, Charlie; lots of people have been frightened out of their lives almost in that room."

"Lots of people are fools," said Charlie, "but I'll tell you what. I have got a splendid idea about that room, and if you will get him sent to sleep in it, we'll do the old boy yet."

* * * * *

That same evening Mr. Bampton—the unconscious object of so much dislike—arrived, and put what Charlie Meadows called the crowning touch to his impudence; for, taking advantage of a bunch of mistletoe hanging in the hall, he actually had the audacity to give Miss Kitty a good, loud kiss as he shook hands with her, remarking with a ponderous attempt at playfulness "Christmas-time, you know, my dear, Christmas-time." That settled it; from that moment his doom was sealed.

In spite, however, of the very unflattering remarks made by Miss Kitty O'Flynn and her lover, truth compels us to state that Mr. Bampton was far from being so very objectionable a person, and there were many ladies in the county who were far from sharing Miss Kitty's objections to him. He was, it is true, over fifty, but modern heroes are very often middle-aged men. Once upon a time the young hero carried all before him, and commanded our sympathies as a matter of right; but that time is now past, and, thanks to lady novelists, elderly suitors are considered to be far more irresistible. Then Mr. Bampton was not at all a bad-looking man. He was very tall and very stout, but some ladies admire





size. And it is true that his head was bald and shiny, yet even baldness has its attractions to some minds.

A self-made man, the son of a very humble farmer, he had begun life as a clerk in an East India merchant's office, was sent out to India, where he became first manager and finally partner in the great mercantile house. He had now retired with such an ample fortune as disposed many to overlook his lack of ancestry in consideration of his not lacking cash.

Having announced (in strict confidence) to several leading matrons of the neighbourhood that he was on the look-out for a wife, he had become an object of much interest to many mothers with eligible, but plain, daughters; lively widows who wished to exchange their weeds for his money bags, and sundry elderly spinsters, who considered Mr. Bampton "just a suitable age for themselves."

Such were not, however, Mr. Bampton's views; he wanted someone who was both youthful and beautiful, or at least pretty, and Miss Kitty O'Flynn had seemed to him exactly the lady to suit his fancy. They had met at different houses in the county, and Mr. Bampton had at last made his formal proposal to her father for her hand. The difference in their ages might be an objection, he said, but the young lady might also remember the old saying, "'Tis better to be an old man's darling than a young man's slave," and as far as money was concerned, Miss Kitty—and for that matter, her father—should have all the advantages that money could give. This last point was, indeed, a great inducement to Mr. O'Flynn, for, like many Irish gentlemen, he was heavily in debt; his estates were mortgaged, his income was always more than anticipated before he got it. Therefore, in his opinion, Mr. Bampton, as a son-in-law willing and able to advance money, was a person by no means to be refused for silly, romantic, school-girl notions, and he had already intimated as much to Miss Kitty, who had not received his announcement in at all a dutiful manner. Mr. O'Flynn had as yet no idea that young Dr. Meadows was another suitor for his daughter's hand, or he would very soon have given that young man his congé.

It was the week before Christmas, and Mr. Bampton had been invited, in company with a good many other guests, to spend the festive season at Mr. O'Flynn's hospitable mansion.

The house was a very large, rambling one, built quite two

hundred years ago, and it was seldom that the Haunted Room required to be used, though Mr. O'Flynn always refused to admit that it was haunted. On this occasion, however, there were so many cousins and old friends who must always be invited to spend Christmas, that Mr. Bampton's arrival filled the house to overflowing, and it was at last decided between Kitty and her father that the ghost's room would have to be given to someone, and as none of the cousins or intimate friends would likely consent to sleep in it, Kitty suggested (rather guiltily, it is true), that as Mr. Bampton was a stranger to the neighbourhood, and ignorant of the unpleasant reputation of the room, he would be the least likely of all to be troubled by ghosts if there were any. The room was one of the best in the house, and handsomely furnished in the old-fashioned heavy style, and with a good fire in the grate it presented a very comfortable appearance. Kitty also bound over the other guests not to say a word to Mr. Bampton about the room or its ghosts.

The dinner that evening was like most dinner-parties in that hospitable house—very noisy and very lively—with no end of eating and drinking, for want of ready money is seldom considered (in Ireland) a reason for making any stint in the hospitable entertainment of one's guests. After dinner there was music, and cards in the drawing-room, and then they all adjourned to the dining-room again for supper, the ladies retiring early, and the gentlemen remaining up, smoking and drinking. In accordance with an old custom a large quantity of wine had been placed upon the table, and the doors locked, and no guest was allowed to leave the room till all the wine had been drunk. As a natural consequence few of the gentlemen could be said to go to bed sober, and Mr. Bampton was as open to the suspicion of having taken too much as any of his neighbours. In fact, he succumbed rather early, and had to be carried up and put to bed by two of the men-servants.

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About a couple of hours later when the last of the guests had got safely to their rooms, Charlie Meadows might have been observed posturing before his looking-glass in a somewhat peculiar costume for a disciple of Esculapius. His face was smeared white with chalk, while his eyebrows were grotesquely outlined with burnt cork, and a red streak of paint under his chin suggested the idea that he had cut his

throat. He had a wild-looking shock of white hair sticking up all over his head, and had wrapped himself up in a large, white sheet. Now he was posing before the glass trying the most effective mode of waving his arms about and shaking his drapery.

"Hem!" he remarked, apostrophising his own reflection, "hem! On the whole I think I make a very presentable 'spook,' quite the traditional article. I am not quite sure whether I had better pose as an ordinary ghost, or as the 'Banshee' attached to this family, and bent on preventing such a vulgar old counter-jumper as old Bampton contaminating the ould stock wid his alliance. I could do the 'wild, long wail,' and the 'crooning, sighing cry' with which that lady usually announces her presence, and if I don't curdle old Bampton's blood and make him promise me anything I like to get rid of me, my name's not Charlie Meadows, that's all. Arrah! a-roon! ahone! ahone!" and he made a realistic pantomime before the glass, expressive of trying to strangle the unlucky Mr. Bampton. Then he put out the candle, slipped out of his room, softly closing the door after him, and stole cautiously down the long corridor to the Haunted Room.

As he did so another door opened very softly behind him, and Kitty peeped out; as she caught sight of her lover she uttered a little scream, shut the door with a bang, locked it, and jumping into bed buried her head under the bed-clothes, afraid to look up any more.

"Oh, dear," she thought, "oh, dear; I do hope nothing bad will happen to Charlie. I wish—I wish I had not let him try it. Oh, it's all too horrible. Perhaps he'll frighten Mr. Bampton into a fit, or drive him mad, or something." And poor Kitty lay trembling and almost crying, longing to stop Charlie and yet afraid to get up or move.

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Whilst Kitty was lying thus trembling and anxious, young Meadows was going through a somewhat remarkable experience on his own account. He made his way to the Haunted Room, and, pushing open the door, stole quietly and cautiously in. The fire in the grate had died down to a red glow, but the room was not dark, for one of the shutters was partly open and a strong ray of moonlight was streaming in, making a bright track across the floor, and showing the furni-

ture, especially the big bed, quite distinctly. It was a large room, wainscotted in dark oak, with a huge wardrobe in one corner that might have held a legion of ghosts itself, and a big chest of drawers opposite the fire-place, while the immense bed looked particularly hearse-like and ghostly. The curtains were not drawn, so that the moonlight fell strongly upon it, and there, in the middle of the bed, lay Mr. Bampton in a deep sleep, snoring like a grampus.

"The great, disgusting brute," muttered Charlie, as he contemplated Mr. Bampton's slumbers, "I believe he's too helplessly drunk for it to be of any use trying to waken him; however, here goes," and pulling out a great bulrush he had brought with him for the purpose, Charlie proceeded to awaken his victim by tickling his nose with it. At first it had no effect, then Mr. Bampton began to move uneasily, but without actually waking up, then Charlie removed the bulrush and began to moan and groan close to old Bampton's ear. Before, however, he could see what effect this had he was considerably startled on his own account by hearing his groan repeated several times close to him, and then he heard most distinctly a low, chuckling laugh—a horrid laugh. He turned quickly to see where it came from, and beheld a great, tall, dark figure, like some large man standing over him. His first thought was that one of the other guests had seen him enter the room and was about to play off a joke upon him in his turn. He therefore made a sudden grab at the figure, when, to his surprise, his hand went through it, and it vanished; at the same time a very large, heavy hand gave him three violent slaps on the back, and again he heard that low, savage laugh.

Again the figure rose up in front of him, seeming to rise out of the floor, and again did he try to grasp his unknown assailant, and this time, to his horror, he found his arms powerless to move; he seemed rooted to the spot, while the dark figure, spreading out its arms like a great bat, swooped down upon him and enveloped him in the folds of its drapery. It seemed all over him, this horrid thing, this unearthly creature, that was so impalpable and yet so real; while a cold chill as of an icy wind blew over him, freezing his very blood. Then he felt himself almost lifted from the ground and borne back through the doorway and along the passage to his own room, where he was deposited in a helpless

heap on the door-mat. Trembling, breathless, filled with a great nameless dread of he knew not what, and with the perspiration standing in great beads upon his forehead, he slowly gathered himself up and crawled into his room and into bed; angry with himself for such a ludicrous termination to his clever plot, and yet too much unnerved and shaken to enter the Haunted Room again.

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Next morning most of the guests were more or less late for breakfast; indeed the meal went on comfortably till nearly one o'clock without anyone's absence exciting surprise, but when at last one o'clock struck and there were no signs of Mr. Bampton, Mr. O'Flynn felt it only polite to enquire what had become of him. Charlie Meadows had come down early, looking very pale and tired and strangely quiet for such a very lively, boisterous young man as he usually seemed. Kitty, too, looked ill, and made several inquiries from the servants as to whether Mr. Bampton had got up yet. She had taken an opportunity to ask Charlie as to the success of his little scheme, but he seemed unwilling to tell her anything, only remarking that, "old Bampton had been so drunk there was no use trying anything on," and then showed so evident a desire to change the subject that she had to defer her inquiries till she could speak to him alone, for she was by no means sure that Charlie had done nothing to her stout wooer. When, therefore, Mr. O'Flynn suggested sending a servant to see if Mr. Bampton was in his room, she eagerly seconded the proposal.

In a few minutes the servant returned white and scared-looking to say that Mr. Bampton was nowhere to be seen, but that someone was groaning and swearing in the room most awfully.

On hearing this account it was at once proposed that the whole party should go upstairs and see what was the matter with Mr. Bampton and the Haunted Room.

Kitty had exchanged a hurried glance with Charlie, who looked very startled when he heard the servant's message, and volunteered the remark that, "Perhaps, after all, there might be some truth in the idea that the room was haunted."

At this suggestion it was resolved that everyone (including

the ladies, who said they would be afraid to stay alone) should go upstairs. So up they all went, Kitty and the other ladies remaining in the corridor, while the gentlemen went into the room to search for the missing guest.

On entering the room the gentlemen also heard the sound of someone groaning, but where it came from no one could tell, except that it seemed to be somewhere about the bed, which had evidently been slept in, but which was most evidently empty now. It was a huge old-fashioned four-poster, with carved woodwork round the top to within four inches of the ceiling, and hung round with heavy drapery. They searched in it and under it, and even behind it, but could see no signs of the missing man. Then they hunted in the great wardrobe, peeped into the big chest of drawers, and even looked up the chimney, but still no signs of Mr. Bampton, and still the sighing and groaning and swearing could be heard, and always most distinctly near the bed. The search party were completely puzzled, till the bright idea occurred to one of them that as he was not in the bed nor under the bed, nor anywhere else that they could see, perhaps he was on the top of the bed. This idea was at once scouted as absurd, and a perfect impossibility, because the space between the ceiling and the cornice of the bed was so small that not even a child could have got through it, much less a great heavy man like Mr. Bampton. However, as the dreadful groaning still continued, a pair of steps was sent for, and the bold gentleman who had originated the idea mounted upon them, and peeped through the little space.

"Halloa!" cried the adventurous one, "here he is after all; but how the deuce did the old boy get up here?"

Mr. Bampton's reply was a savage growl, and a promise to make it warm for the d—— fools who had played him such a trick; a sentiment greeted with a universal shout of laughter from the rescuers, so great was their relief at finding him alive and unhurt.

Poor Mr. Bampton was lying in a sort of well or hollow formed of the roof of the bed and the canopy round it, and the space was so small that he could not turn or move in any way, and was therefore very stiff and cramped; moreover he had nothing on but his nightshirt, and as the night had been very cold it was no wonder he was expressing his feelings very strongly. It was found quite impossible to get

poor Mr. Bampton out of his uncomfortable quarters ; so at last it was decided to send for a carpenter, for the bed had been up for so very many years that the screws were quite rusted and no one could unscrew them to take the cornice down, which was found to be the only way to release him. A man on a horse was therefore sent off to the village for a couple of carpenters, and meantime blankets were passed up with some trouble to the unfortunate prisoner, who could not even help to spread them over himself. Small wonder, then, that when at last, after a good hour's delay, Mr. Bampton was got out by the carpenters sawing away a part of the cornice, he was in a towering rage. He was covered with dust and cobwebs, and presented a most deplorable spectacle. He refused to listen to what anyone said, and insisted on leaving the house at once. He considered, he said, "that a deliberate plot had been laid to insult and injure him ; he only hoped he had not caught his death of cold on the top of that confounded bed. It was no use for the gentlemen, one and all, to offer him their solemn words of honour that none of them had touched him ; he insisted that someone must have put him there—a good many people, he should say ; for they knew best themselves which of them had done it. He had no doubt Mr. O'Flynn thought it a good joke. Oh, yes, he had heard them all laugh—yes, laugh!—when he was found. No one need try to humbug him by pretending to be sorry and not to understand about it. He knew better, and considered he had been most shamefully, shamefully treated."

And thus in a furious rage, and refusing to hear anything that Mr. O'Flynn could say, did Mr. Bampton shake the dust of that house, and that bed, from him and go forth in his indignation and wrath.

How Mr. Bampton really got upon the top of the bed remained a mystery to everyone ; no human being could have put him there, it was quite impossible, and everyone swore most solemnly that he had not done so. The most careful examination of the bed threw no light upon the subject, and certainly Mr. Bampton was so drunk he could not have climbed there himself, even had there been a space for him to get through, which most certainly there was not, so at last the solution was unanimously adopted that the ghosts must have put him there from some freak of their own.

As for Charlie, he preserved a discreet silence about his

experience in that room, and it was not till long after, when Kitty had become Mrs. Meadows, and he himself was a successful practitioner in Dublin, making a good income, that he at last imparted what he had seen on that eventful night to a few intimate friends. They had all been dining together and were all telling each other remarkable stories under the genial influences of the good dinner and the good wine. Charlie's narrative, while it threw no light upon the means by which Mr. Bampton had been put on the top of the bed, yet considerably strengthened the ghost theory, and it was thought as well to shut up the Haunted Room altogether, and leave it in the possession of its ghostly occupants.

A Weird Tryste.

It was near the end of the season at Mussoorie, and the fashionable hill-station was crowded with invalids from the hot plains. In rocky nooks of the steep hillsides nestled the white houses almost buried in great masses of flowering shrubs. Nearly seven thousand feet below lay the great plains, hot and hazy, looking like a great oven, while up here the air was fresh and cool and health-giving.

On the terrace of one of the houses overlooking the great Pass, a pretty girl, with golden hair and deep violet blue eyes, was sitting reading or pretending to read, while ever and anon her eyes wandered over the winding pathway to the house as though looking for someone. Presently she gave a little cry of joy, and jumping up from her seat with a briskness that showed she was not one of the invalids, waved her handkerchief in welcome to a young man who toiled up the path to meet her with as much speed as its steepness would allow. Another minute and the girl was in his arms, and he was kissing her soft cheek, and smoothing aside the stray locks of her fair hair.

"Oh, Alfred, what has made you so late? Tiffin has been over for an hour or more. We began to think at last that you would never come."

"Better late than never, Adela; but, to tell the truth, there was an accident just before the match finished. Browne, of the Lancers, got a nasty fall, and we had to carry him home. So I had to ride over and tell his people, and then I waited to hear the doctor's report. Luckily there are no bones broken, but he has had a nasty fall."

"Poor Captain Browne!" cried Adela; "I do hope he will get better soon; and, oh, how I hate that horrid polo! I wish you would promise never to play any more; I am always afraid you will get hurt; and then it is cruel to the poor ponies—they get such hard knocks often."

"Oh, the ponies! no one ever troubles about them. You'd never have any sport if you were always thinking about the animals and their feelings; and as to danger, why one is sur

rounded by it in some shape every day. But, here; come along and help me to apologise to your aunt for keeping you all waiting"; and drawing Adela's arm through his own, Alfred led her into the house.

Adela Maldon was an orphan. She had been born in India, and sent home for a few years for her education, and since her return had lived with her uncle, Colonel Maldon, who held the post of Commissioner for one of the hot and by no means healthy districts in the plains of Hindostan. Adela and her aunt had been spending the summer season at Mussoorie, where Captain Alfred Mordaunt, of the Dragoons, was also staying on sick leave. The young people had been thrown much together, and the acquaintance had soon ripened into love. Mordaunt was now the acknowledged lover of pretty Miss Maldon, and the marriage was to take place as soon as the formal consent of Mordaunt's parents in England had been obtained.

The lovers idled away the rest of the afternoon in the usual lover-like talk, and about six o'clock went for a drive with Mrs. Maldon upon the Mall, a fine broad road that winds round the mountain called the Camel's Back, from which the view was magnificent, and you had the excitement of driving with a deep precipice on one side and a steep mass of rocks on the other, so that if your horse happened to take fright at anything, you stood a chance of being plunged into the ravine.

There was the usual gay crowd riding and driving on the Mall, and many were the greetings exchanged with Mordaunt and his fiancée as they drove; while not a few young ladies envied Adela her good fortune. Alfred was young, rich, handsome, and heir to a fine estate at home; so, of course, there had been a good many little plots to capture him on the part of various scheming mammas and chaperons who "wondered what he could see about that shy, quiet little Miss Maldon."

That night, as Adela was bidding her lover good-night upon the terrace, she again begged him to give up polo playing, or at least to be more careful in his play.

"I have been haunted all the evening," she said, "by the fear of some accident happening to you, and then if you were killed what should I do? I would never get over it, I should have to follow you into the next world."

"Or rather, Adela, I should have to return to you as a ghost. But why, my dearest love, torment yourself with these foolish fears. Think how often I have played, and how seldom I have even had a fall. Why do you dwell upon this so much to-night? I am sorry now I told you of the accident to-day."

"Yes, Alfred, I know it seems foolish to you, but I am so nervous and anxious I cannot help it; and you must come here to-morrow as soon as ever the match is over. I shall not be happy till I have you safely with me again."

"Oh! never fear, my Adela. I'll keep my tryste; surely enough even if I get killed I shall come back to you."

"Alfred, dearest, don't jest, please, on such a subject. I can't bear it."

"Well then seriously, most anxious and timid of little women, I promise you to come back, I will fly to your side the moment I can do so, and I shall claim an extra special number of kisses as a reward of my devotion." And then with a last tender adieu they parted—Alfred going down the little path in the moonlight, and Adela lingering to catch the last glimpse of his retreating figure. At the last turn of the path he stopped and looked back to kiss his hand, Adela waved her handkerchief to him in reply, and thus they parted to meet again—ah! where and when indeed?

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Adela passed a restless night, haunted by a presentiment of coming evil she tried in vain to combat. Alfred's light, jesting words, "I shall have to return as a ghost to you," recurred to her mind with an ever-increasing sense of alarm. Death to her was a terrible thing, and his careless speech seemed like an omen of evil. Strange indeed are these forebodings of sorrow—strange and yet merciful, since but for the chord of alarm they strike in our hearts, preparing us for the sorrow to come, our reason might often give way under the shock of unlooked-for calamity.

Long before there was any chance of Mordaunt's return Adela was out upon the terrace watching for him, and, as the time passed on and he did not come, her heart sank lower and lower, and her anxiety became almost unbearable. At last she saw the figure of a man approaching up the path, but to

her surprise and alarm it was not Mordaunt, but a Lieutenant Petre of the same regiment, who was also to have been one of the players in the polo match. Opening the little gate, Adela ran down the path to meet him, and catching him excitedly by the arm, exclaimed, "Where is Alfred? Why has he not come? Tell me; oh! please tell me quickly if anything has happened to him."

Something in the young man's look, something in his voice and manner as he took Adela's hands in his, and began to say, "Wait, Miss Maldon, a little," told her the truth and confirmed her worst fears, and with a low cry of anguish she sank insensible at the lieutenant's feet.

He lifted her up and carried her into the house, and then taking Mrs. Maldon aside broke to her the sad news that Mordaunt had been killed. His horse had fallen in one of the great scimmages of the game and rolling over on his rider had crushed him to death.

Poor Adela lay ill for weeks, but she did not die, though she prayed in her despair that death might come to her also. When we are young we do not die so easily, even though our hearts are broken; and slowly, little by little, Adela struggled back to life.

Her friends took her for a change of scene to Calcutta, hoping that in the society of the city she might forget in a measure the one she had lost, or even meet with another who could fill his place in her heart. But Adela's heart sought only for the lost one, and in her grief she prayed that Alfred's words might come true, and that even as a spirit he might return to her. And, alas! with her as with others, no answer seemed to come to her prayers—no echo from that land of silence to which he had passed.

Spring came again, waking all Nature to new life. To Adela only it brought no new hopes, no promise for the future; she lived only in the past, and day by day grew more sad, more fragile-looking.

She had returned now to her uncle's house at Wallahpore, where a small party of her uncle's friends were staying.

The gentlemen went out shooting in the early morning, before the heat grew too intense, and then slept or loitered about the bungalow till tiffin time (two o'clock), while the ladies tried to keep themselves cool and amused in the best way they could. The weather was hot, and life was dull even

at the best of times in Wallahpore, and any accidental diversion was welcomed with as much enthusiasm as people who are slowly simmering in a sort of oven can get up over anything.

When, therefore, the khansamah came in one afternoon to announce that a fakir from the Nilgiri Hills was outside, and would, if the sahibs desired, exhibit some of his marvellous feats of jugglery and magic, the proposal was received with acclamation by the whole party, who at once adjourned to the verandah.

Mrs. Maldon had ventured a feeble protest on the ground that the Colonel objected to all such exhibitions, but as he was away from home for a few days upon business it was decided that there would be no need to tell him anything about it on his return.

In front of the verandah they found the fakir awaiting them—a tall, lean native, whose age might have been anywhere between forty and sixty, so withered and dried-up-looking was he. The yellow skin was drawn over almost fleshless bones, long straight black hair hung upon his shoulders, while the immobility of his face was lightened up by very large bright black eyes, whose piercing glance when he raised them for a moment seemed able to read the very secrets of the soul. Now, however, he bowed himself almost to the earth before the sahibs in the most profound of "salaams." He wore only a loose cotton robe wrapped round him, after the native manner, leaving his arms, legs, and feet bare, and affording no possible means of concealing any conjuring apparatus about his person. He carried with him only a couple of funnel-shaped baskets and a small flute-like reed, upon which he sometimes played the slow plaintive music of the country for such of his native audiences as desired it.

After showing some of the more simple tricks of the Indian jugglers, he asked for a pot of fresh earth and some small articles to experiment with, and was given a gold brooch containing a lock of hair and an inscription on the back, also an English sovereign and a penknife. He first sowed some seeds of the sacred *Ixora* plant in the pot of earth, and then covered it with one basket, while he covered the small articles with the other, then, withdrawing about five feet away from the two baskets (which remained in full view of everyone) seated himself upon the ground with his knees drawn up to his chin and

his hands clasped round them, and appeared to pass into a state of trance.

After the lapse of about ten minutes he roused himself suddenly, and without moving from his position asked that some of the gentlemen should lift the larger basket. To the astonishment of everyone, the basket on being lifted displayed not only the pot of earth, but a perfect miniature specimen of the *Ixora*, or fire-tree, crowned with its mass of bright scarlet and yellow blossoms. The little tree was only about two feet high, but as perfect a specimen of the *Ixora* as it was possible to see—a plant, moreover, that lived and flourished long after the fakir had left the neighbourhood. The fakir next asked that the other basket be lifted, and when that was done, the penknife had disappeared, while in place of one brooch there were three all exactly alike, even to the hair and inscription, and the sovereign had become quite a little pile of golden sovereigns. The most mysterious thing about them was, however, that while the gentlemen were handling and examining the money it seemed to melt away in their fingers, like fairy gold, and disappear, leaving only the original coin and the one brooch. As for the penknife it was found buried at the root of a large tree the fakir pointed out, though how it could have got there was a mystery, since the earth showed no signs of having been disturbed, and was indeed so dry and hard that it took some trouble to dig it up. How these tricks were done was a mystery, since none of the native servants had had a chance of approaching the fakir, and the man himself had never moved from the place where he had seated himself.

When the wonder at these tricks had subsided, the fakir approached to make his salaams and to receive the reward of his ingenuity.

"I say, old yellow-skin," cried a smart young civilian, who regarded all natives as a set of "niggers," and treated them accordingly; "I say, what will you take to show me how you did that trick with the sovereign, hey?"

The fakir's dark piercing eyes flashed a momentary glance of scorn at the speaker, then bowing his head with the usual humble, servile manner of natives, he answered, "Seyd Guddrea does not do these things; it is the spirits of the air who do them—those who have gone on before. The sahib could never learn to do these things."

"Here, cut that balderdash, old fellow, and say plainly you don't mean to tell me; don't want to give yourself away, in fact; but don't talk that rot to me."

Seyd Guddrea gave the young man another glance of contempt and wrath, this time scarcely veiled by a bow, and turning on his heel plunged into the thick undergrowth of trees, quickly disappearing.

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A few hours later Adela, who had been present at the fakir's performance, was lying on the couch in her own room, thinking her own sad thoughts—thinking of those happy days at Mussoorie, and how short, how sweet had been that dream of love and joy; and her tears fell fast as she thought that never again on earth could she see that face or clasp that hand as in the happy past.

The door opened softly and a middle-aged native woman came in. Amritta had been Adela's nurse and constant attendant from her babyhood, and it was to this Indian woman, who had shared and soothed her childish griefs, that Adela turned even now for comfort, rather than to her aunt, Mrs. Maldon, whose formal manner and calm self-control chilled rather than won her confidences.

With the soft, noiseless tread of her race Amritta approached the couch, and kneeling down beside it drew Adela's head to her loving breast, and stroked her hair gently with her hands, as though she was a suffering child; then as Adela's tears gradually ceased, she said in Hindustanee, "Does the heart of my beloved mistress grieve as ever for the lost one? Is there courage to face even the unknown in search of him? For, if there be but courage, Amritta knows of a way to bring him back even for a brief space. Adela can see again that beloved one if she will fear nothing she may see or hear, and will believe that the spirits of the mighty dead who love her can guard her from all harm."

"Amritta," cried Adela in a startled voice, "what do you mean? Of what wild dreams do you speak?"

"Amritta herself cannot bring back the dead to Adela, but she knows one who can. The fakir Seyd Guddrea can bring him back. Those things which he did to-day to amuse the feringhee sahibs are as nothing to the powers he has

That served to while away an idle hour for those who can understand nothing better; but if her beloved mistress so wills, Amritta will get him to return and show what he can do, even to showing her the face of the dead whom the English sahibs deem so very far away," said Amritta, with an accent of scorn in her voice.

"Oh, Amritta! it is impossible! You are mad, and I am so, too, to hope it, and yet, ah, me! if it were but possible, even possible, I would dare anything only to see his face again, only to hear his voice," and Adela's voice died away in a sob.

"To-night, my mistress, if all be well, you shall see him stand before you again, and your own eyes shall tell you if Amritta has spoken the words of truth or only lies."

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Brightly shone the moon that night as she only shines in tropic lands, and the soft radiance of her light filled the dining-room of the bungalow when Adela, Amritta, and the fakir entered it. The house was still and quiet—everyone was in bed—and the native servants, who had been told by Amritta of what was intended, were to give warning should any of the European inmates be likely to disturb them.

Amritta first carefully fastened all the windows and doors, asking Adela to see that there was no one in the room but their three selves. Then Adela (who was too much excited to feel afraid) seated herself in the great arm-chair, with Amritta on the floor at her feet, and the fakir a few feet away, near a small tripod stand, upon which he had placed a small hand-lamp. Then pouring a handful of sweet-scented powder into the flame he prostrated himself in prayer for a moment, chanting something in a very low, soft voice; rising, he retired about a yard from the tripod, and assuming the same attitude he had done whilst performing his wonders of the afternoon, he seemed to pass into the sleep or trance.

The powder burned slowly, and as the smoke rose, strange, glowing sparks of light began to flicker about the room, a soft, wild music seemed to fill the air and float backwards and forwards, now near, now far away, while shadowy forms appeared to rise above and around the crouching figure of the fakir; at first indistinct, as though formed of mist, and then gradually growing more and more solid, till at last out of the

cloud of mist came the form of a man, shrouded in a long, white garment covering even the head. Nearer and nearer it came to Adela (who till then had sat wondering and fascinated, but neither alarmed nor nervous), and as the figure drew near she began to tremble like a leaf, and a wild longing possessed her to rise and touch the veiled figure. Closer and closer it came, and then within two feet of her it stopped and all sense of fear passed from Adela's heart, and only a feeling of expectation remained. Raising one arm slowly, it drew back the covering from the head, revealing to her astonished, longing eyes the features of Alfred Mordaunt. Ah! yes, just as she had known him in life, only with a sadness, a wistful longing in the eyes, she had never seen before. As she gazed spell-bound, the eyes looked back in answering love to hers, and the lips moved as though to speak, but no sound came save a sigh that spoke the longing of his soul to hers. She stretched out her hand to touch the phantom, and her hand was clasped by one that was cold, yet firm and soft as her own. Gently it was lifted to the spirit's lips, and a long, lingering, passionate kiss was pressed upon it.

Then, even as she gazed, the form glided away and faded slowly from her sight, till where it stood there was nothing. The sweet-scented smoke still floated from the brazier, and still the fakir crouched entranced and motionless, but the form of her beloved was gone. In a low voice, broken by her sobs, Adela implored him to come again, that she might not think it but some wild dream; and even as she spoke the pillar of mist formed again, and from it stepped forth once more the form of Mordaunt, with head bare, and arms extended to her—Alfred himself beyond a doubt—none could deceive her as to that face, every line, every feature of which she knew so well—that face that smiled at her now with a sad, sweet smile, while from the parted lips the voice said, "Come, for I can come no closer to you." And Adela rose and glided to him, all doubts, all fears gone in the joy of that perfect recognition. It seemed neither strange nor fearful to feel those arms close around her, and to feel his lips pressed to hers again. She felt nothing but the joy of that one brief moment when again she stood face to face with him whom she had loved and lost, gazing into the eyes, and scanning every feature.

But soon, alas! all too soon, the arms that held her seemed

to lose their grasp, the features grew dim and indistinct, while the voice, faint now as a whisper, said, "Adieu! adieu! but we shall meet again ere long; adieu!" Then the phantom faded from her gaze, and the sad, plaintive music filled the air once more. A hand—a man's hand, without wrist or arm—floated towards her, bearing a white moss-rose, and on the little finger Adela recognised a ring she had once given to Alfred as a keepsake. The hand came close to her, and placed the rose in the bosom of her dress, and then disappeared, and as it did so, the ring fell into her lap.

Then there arose the form of an old Brahmin with flowing white hair and beard, dressed in a yellow robe, and a girdle round the waist. In his hand he bore a brilliant light like a star, and at his appearance Amritta bowed her head to the ground and murmured a prayer, which the spirit answered by some words in a strange language, holding his hands towards them as in benediction. Then, pointing to the sleeping fakir, glided to him and melted gradually from sight.

The smoke died down in the brazier; the bright moonlight shone clear and cold into the room, and the fakir roused himself from his trance. In Adela's lap lay the ring, and in her bosom rested the rose—tokens that all had not been a dream.

* * * * *

Late next afternoon Colonel Maldon returned unexpectedly. He was in great wrath about a fakir whom he had found performing some tricks in the native village as he passed through, and who had the impudence to propose to show him a sample of his powers. "I pretty soon showed him a sample of mine," said the choleric Colonel, "for I had him marched off to prison as a rogue, and vagabond, and thief, which I have no doubt the fellow is, if we knew the truth about him."

"But, Colonel," remonstrated Mr. Sharpe, the resident magistrate of the district, who was staying at the bungalow, "we can't keep the fellow in prison because he happens to be a juggler and a Brahmin, and we think him a scamp; the law won't allow it, whatever our private feelings may be. I shall have to discharge him if he is brought before me to-morrow."

"Humph!" grunted the Colonel, "you can do what you like to-morrow, but for to-night he stops where he is, and per-

haps it will be a lesson to the rascal to keep out of my way for the future."

"Oh, well, Colonel, we can give him a caution when we discharge him if you like. Those jugglers practise their arts all over India, and no one troubles to do more than laugh at their tricks, which are wonderful enough in all conscience."

"Yes, that is just the evil of it; that is just what gives them their power over these poor, ignorant natives; they are a part of a false system—a false religion—and I, as an Englishman and a Churchman, intend to put these fellows down wherever I can do so."

"Well, Colonel, you may look at it from that point of view, but I am afraid the law won't support you; and, after all, these natives have as much a right to their religious opinions as we have to ours."

"A right, sir!" thundered Colonel Maldon. "No man has a right to believe what is wrong." Whereupon there ensued a lengthy and heated argument between the two gentlemen, in which the fakir was soon forgotten.

Adela heard with bitter disappointment of the arrest of the fakir, and tried in her timid way to shake the Colonel's determination, but in vain.

She had obtained a promise from the fakir that he would return again that night and show her once more the form of her beloved Alfred. And now she felt that would be impossible; the fakir would never venture to enter the house again. She could hardly help showing her disappointment before her uncle, and at last made an excuse to go to her room early and lie down. There she lay for some hours, and at last, too restless to sleep, she arose, and putting on a loose white dressing-gown, she seated herself at the window and gazed at the silent woods and garden bathed in the soft moonlight.

And while she gazed, a strange thing happened. The air became filled with the wild, beautiful music she had heard the night before. Floating in waves of melody on the night breeze, closer and closer it came, till it hovered over her head as though the invisible player stood by her side. And then she saw two figures come up the steps of the verandah. The one was the fakir, tall, gaunt, and withered-looking; the other? oh, joy! it was Alfred himself, no longer sad and wistful as last night, but bright, radiant, happy as in life, holding out his arms to her, and calling her to come to him. And Adela

rose and ran to him, and threw her arms around his neck, and felt him clasp her to his heart.

Other watchers heard the strange music that night. Mr. Sharpe, whose room was at the same side of the bungalow as Adela's, happened to be sitting at his window smoking a cigar and enjoying the cool night air, when his ears caught the sound of that weird melody, and his eyes saw the strange meeting between the spirits of Adela and her lover, while the fakir stood by; and so real did these three appear to Mr. Sharpe that it was not till afterwards that he realised they could not be living persons.

Amritta also, who was lying on a mat near her mistress's window, heard the mysterious music, and saw the two come on to the verandah, and Adela, in her white dress, pass from her room (as she thought) to meet them and join her lover; then she saw him tenderly carrying Adela in his arms, as the three turned and passed quickly down the steps again, vanishing from her sight.

Then a great fear came to Amritta, for she knew the fakir was shut up in the prison and could not be here. It must then be his astral or double that had come to keep the appointment with Adela. And then there was Mordaunt who was dead, and Adela whom she had left in her room; how came they all together in the bright moonlight? Filled with a great fear and awe, Amritta hastened to Adela's room and to the wicker chair where the form of the young girl was still sitting, and, kneeling down beside her, Amritta clasped the cold, white hand in her own, and called upon her beloved mistress to speak, to awaken; but there was no response, no awakening of the silent form. The soul of Adela had gone forth to join him she loved in the bright land beyond the grave, united at last by the white-robed Angel of Death.

EPILOGUE.

Mourn not! Though Earth's hopes from thee fly,
Though Love's sweet flow'rets fade and die,
In that bright Land beyond the sky,
Love's flowers shall bloom again.

Though dark the way thy feet must tread,
Love's holy lamp her light doth shed.
Look up! Hope's star is o'er thy head,
Her rays shall shine on thee.

Pilgrims—whose hearts with grief have bled—
Seek not the living 'mid the dead;
Those earthly forms to die were made,
And set their spirits free.



THE END.



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